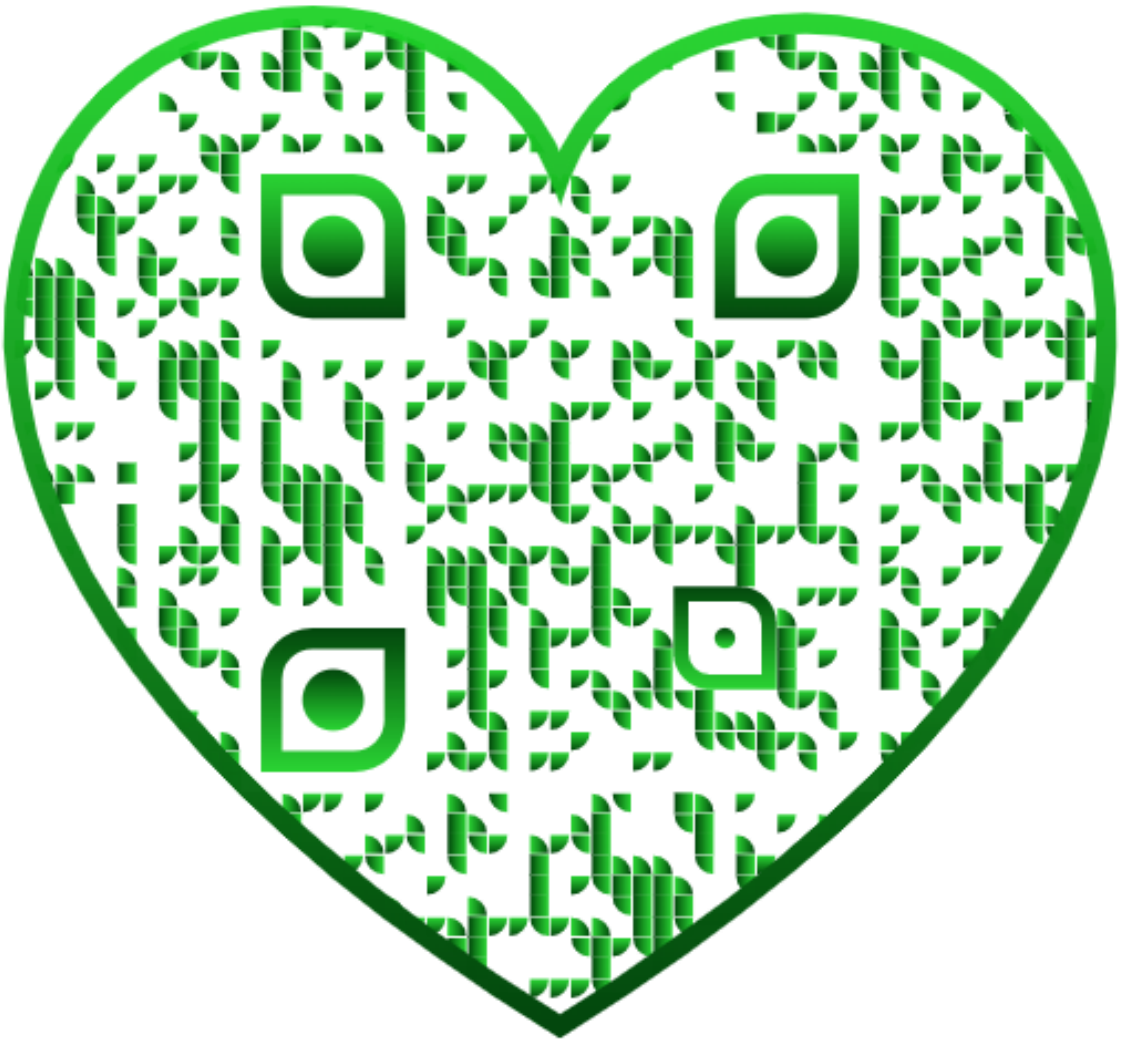
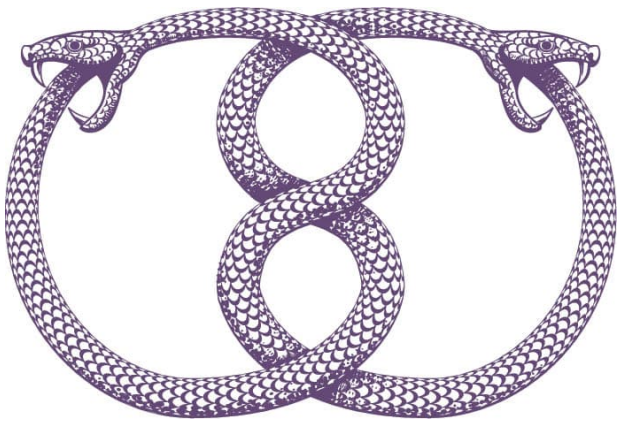
NORSE MYSTICISM

An Exploration of Viking Traditions and Magical Practices

DISA FORVITIN





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INTRODUCTION

Thinking of Norse mythology may evoke imagery of Vikings and make you think of countries like Sweden and Norway. While these populations did practice the Norse mysticism as portrayed in this book, much of the folklore, mythology, and practices were rooted in northern Germanic tribes. Gods and goddesses of early Germanic mythology morphed into the figures we associate with Norse epics such as *The Poetic Edda* and *The Prose Edda*, which are some of the oldest written records of Norse mythology and seminal to our modern understanding of it.

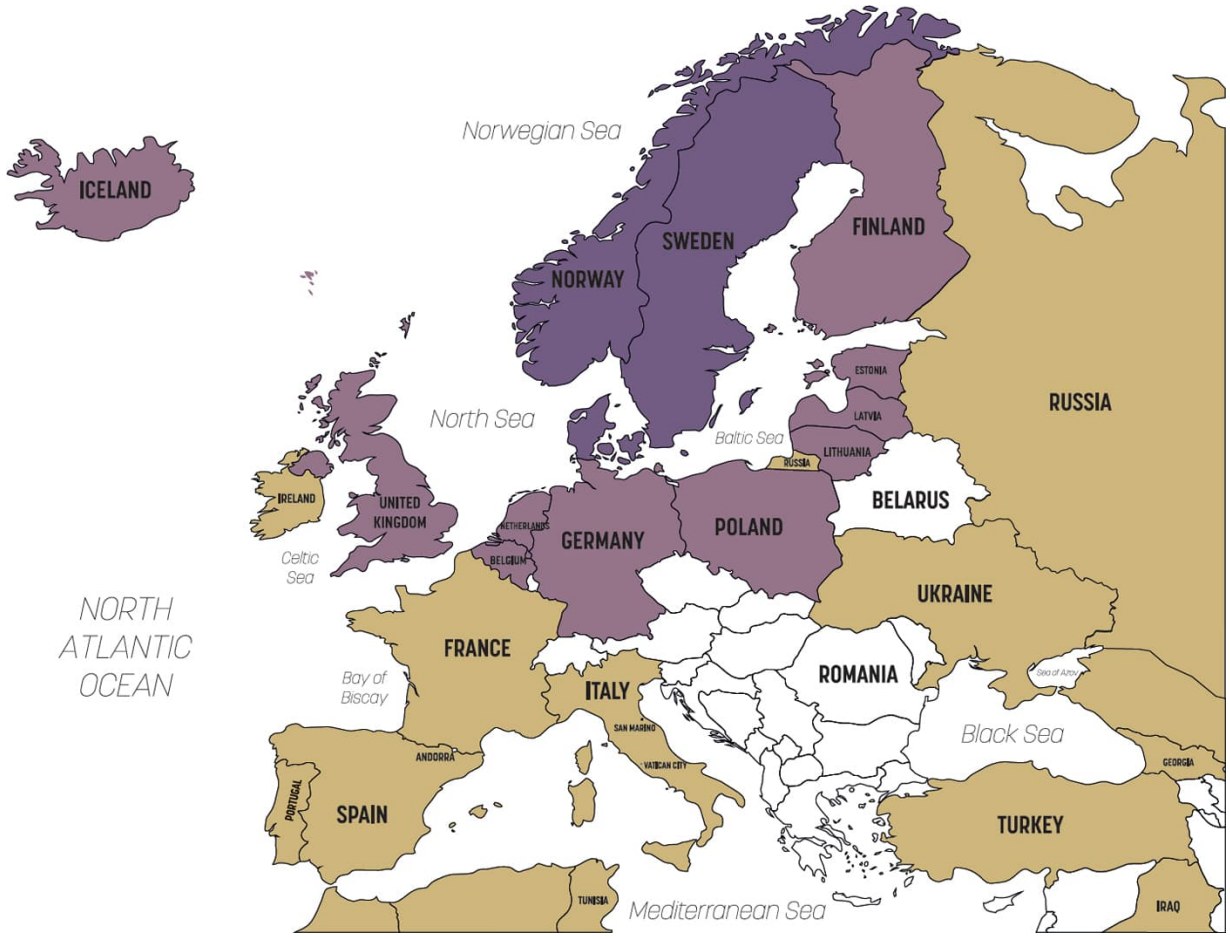
There are many ways that Norse mythology manifests in current pop culture: Marvel's Mighty Thor comics created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (1962–present) and Neil Gaiman's book *Norse Mythology* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2017) come to mind first. While these stories are heavily influenced by traditional Nordic roots, they don't usually capture the complexities of the source materials or do much to link themselves to the everyday lives of the people they influenced.

Norse myths differ greatly from the stories of Abrahamic religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, for example—that are focused on teaching the difference between good and bad, moral and unethical. Their tales were

often closer to riddles that were meant to make the reader or listener think. Myths and stories served as tools to teach their people about what mattered to them and how the world worked.

Most of the Norse mythological stories were also passed down through generations by oral tradition, meaning they were conveyed by word of mouth over generations. Different regional areas had slightly differing versions that their storytellers would tell that likely featured local geography, customs, and events. Nowadays, many historians, folklorists, and pagans may espouse theories or statements that directly contradict each other. If you delve into Norse mysticism after reading this book, some of what you read in the pages that follow might also not match up exactly with what you find. Due to the way oral traditions are told and passed down (and the fact that the consolidation of Norse mythology was not as effective as it was in places like ancient Greece and ancient Rome), there are many different versions of iconic stories in Norse mythology. Many modern heathens—pagans specifically following Norse mystic traditions—feel strongly that one interpretation of the source material is truer or more accurate than the rest. Some even feel like certain depictions and interpretations are disrespectful to the gods and goddesses of Norse mythology. In most cases, none of them is more correct than the other. However, the source material varies in its representations of what happens in each other's myths due to the cultural influence of the region the stories were being told in.

Throughout the book, you'll see many of the characters, locations, and items that sometimes go by several different names. That's because these stories were first written down by primarily Christian missionaries who transcribed them phonetically. As such, there are a few different primary sources that conflict on how to spell or pronounce. It doesn't necessarily mean that any of the spellings are wrong, but rather that phonetics changed from location to location and translator to translator.



GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE OF NORSE CULTURE

- Norse Lands (Modern Scandanavia)
- Norse Influences and Settlements
- Contact with Norse Tribes

You will see Old Norse words throughout. On many occasions (usually when there's a specific reference to people and places) the most anglicized version of their name will be used. In other instances, usually when referring to a magical act, the original Old Norse will be kept and italicized. You will find some instances where the mythology was so widespread that it spanned several areas. For instance, there were Old Saxon, Old High German, and other antiquated names for the characters and places. All these names are indicated for two reasons: First, if you're developing a personal relationship with a god or goddess, knowing all their names will help you compose venerations for them in your spells. Additionally, a few of these

names look the same and it can be confusing to tease out which name is just another one of Odin's and which name was a different entity entirely.

This map of the geographical range of Norse culture illustrates how difficult it was to keep tales consistent across the sea and highlights general areas where the people whom we would consider as "Norse" would have extended their sphere of influence.

Use this book as a guide to what early Norse practices meant for the people who initiated them, and as a roadmap on how to incorporate this ancient wisdom into your own practices. They are informed by source material from texts dating from 800 to 1000 CE and are meant to grow with the people who practice them. I encourage you to move away from the idea that practices such as spells and rituals must be performed exactly as they were by the ancient Norse people. Our belief in our actions gives them power, and Old Norse mysticism can teach us a lot about our inherent interconnectedness with other realms and the gods. Use this ancient wisdom to develop a personal practice that works in your modern lifestyle.

A NOTE ON THE CO-OPTING OF NORSE SYMBOLISM BY HATE GROUPS

Although my goal in this book is to help newcomers fall in love with the beauty and magic of Norse spirituality, it is also important to be aware that there are hate groups and prison gangs that try to use the symbols and stories of this tradition to promote violent ideologies. Neo-Nazis and other white supremacist organizations sometimes use iconography that includes variants of the runes, images such as Yggdrasil (the world tree), and Nazi designs from the Third Reich. These groups seek to lay a claim to Norse symbology, causing a negative association which may lead some people interested in this tradition to fear they would not find a welcoming community.

However, it has been my experience that there are just as many, if not more, communities of witches, heathens, and other practitioners of Norse paganism that promote an inclusive and anti-racist vision of Norse spirituality. There are more resources than ever to help newcomers to the space to learn to identify and combat hateful appropriations of our tradition,

and many heathen groups that uplift and embrace people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, and other ethnic, religious, linguistic, and sexual groups. Rather than letting white supremacists claim and distort our spirituality, we fight to banish their beliefs to the past by honoring the original context in which the symbols were defined by the Norse people and implementing inclusive practices.

To this end, it is useful to know a little about how these despicable ideologies came to adopt Norse symbolism. Norse mythology became more familiar and mainstream in Europe during the late nineteenth century, at a time when people were looking to the ancient past to inspire their art and spirituality. The Norse gods appeared in paintings and theatrical shows. There were also plenty of books on rune magic that were being published by occult societies.

By the early twentieth century, nationalism and anti-Semitism were also on the rise in Europe. In Germany, these ideologies exploited elements of Norse myth to promote their cause, essentially marketing the idea of the superiority of the so-called "Aryan race." While Norse spirituality did not cause these issues and ideologies, its symbolism was already being co-opted by the time the Nazi Party took power in Germany. For example, mythological heroes like Siegfried were mentioned in party speeches, and runic symbols were incorporated into Waffen-SS uniforms (which were the military branch of the Nazi Party). For these reasons, modern practitioners usually regard the work of this period with a critical eye, aware of the inaccuracies and bias that is often found there.

As you get to know the myths and magic presented in this book, I hope you will see that there is still so much we can learn from Norse traditions and feel empowered to find resources and communities to help you continue your journey down a safe and inclusive path with a sensitive eye and a compassionate understanding of the true nature of Norse symbolism.

CHAPTER 1

EARLY NORDIC SOCIETY

What's considered Norse? When you hear about Norse history or culture, the term "Viking" may be the first thing that comes to mind. Many people use the word Viking as a descriptor of all people living in Scandinavia from ancient to medieval times, but this is inaccurate. For one thing, the word "Viking" refers not to a general population, but to the occupation of sailing as a raider or settler, and this term did not come into use until the eighth century. Norse culture was not a monolith limited to the modern Nordic countries but had its origins in Germanic language and culture that has stretched its influence from England in the west to Russia in the east, and south through Germany and other continental European countries. Understanding the cultural origins and influences of early Norse society helps provide a context that illuminates the mystical practices that have survived today.

TERMINOLOGY

There are several overlapping terms that refer to different groups of people and the geographic regions they lived in. For example, the term "Scandinavia" is used in reference to the region of Northern Europe consisting of modern-day Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. To zoom out a bit more, the term "Nordic" is typically used as an umbrella term that encompasses the Scandinavian countries, as well as Iceland, Finland, Greenland, Aland, and the Faroe Islands. Most of the people in these regions spoke Old Norse roughly from the ninth to thirteenth centuries, and their culture is and was referred to as "Norse." However, the Germanic influence is so strong that it can't be ignored. The term "Germanic" refers to both the Germanic language family (which impacted modern-day languages such as English, Swedish, and Yiddish), and to the various cultural groups speaking these languages who occupied parts of Western, Central, and Northern Europe from the Bronze Age through the Middle Ages.

HUMAN MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

Humans first arrived in the southern reaches of Scandinavia around 9000 BCE, during what is considered the Stone Age. During this period, people were nomadic and survived by hunting for their food and foraging in the forests, moving between the mountains and the lowlands, following game depending on the season. Both men and women participated in hunting, but farming was adopted much later in the region due to the challenging climate. Religion as we know it did not exist yet, but we know that animism, spirit work, and ancestor veneration were important to these tribes. The Jotnar giants and Vanir gods (see **here** and **here**) described in Norse mythology may have started as nature spirits worshiped during this period.

Around 3000 BCE, the Indo-Europeans migrated west from Central Asia to Europe, bringing with them farming, livestock, the wheel and cart, pottery, and the language that would form the foundations of the Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian) and Germanic language families. Through trade, warfare, and cultural

assimilation, the people of Scandinavia adopted many aspects of Indo-European culture, including the farming of cattle for trade and food, the organization of social groups around tribes and clans, and deities who later became the gods of the Aesir pantheon (see **here**).

THE NORDIC BRONZE AGE

As metal tools were developed and traded across Europe, people shifted from hunting and gathering to farming and herding to support themselves. The consolidation of land among powerful clans eventually led to the rulership of kings, as well as the development of a nascent priest class called gothi (or *guþi* in Old Norse) to support them.

It's here that the earliest origins of Norse mythology can be found. Cave paintings and carved petroglyphs show a sun goddess who may have been a precursor to the Norse goddess, Freyja. Early versions of other Vanir gods, and possibly even Thor, have been discovered in religious artifacts from this period.

As the Bronze Age gave way to the Iron Age and beyond, the cultural and social landscape of Europe continued to evolve. The Germanic tribes to the south of Scandinavia continued to grow and engage in cultural exchange with people in Scandinavia. However, the power and influence of the Germanic tribes were limited by the first century CE. They were hemmed in by Celtic tribes to their west (a group commonly associated with Ireland and Scotland, where they later settled), and the Romans to the south on the Italian peninsula.

THE DIVERSITY OF NORTHERN EUROPE

The fall of the Western Roman Empire in the fourth century led to enormous changes in Europe, especially to the benefit of many Germanic tribes. Starting in the fifth century, the Migration Period led Norse and Germanic tribes in extending their range and influence. While tribes such as the Angles and Saxons settled in England, the Franks took over Gaul, and the Rus founded towns in modern-day Russia along their trade route with Constantinople.

In studying the expansion, migration, and cultural contact of Norse and Germanic tribes, we can see that they were far from insulated. Norse tribes had a great deal of contact with other cultures throughout their history. As far back as the Bronze Age, Norse tribes shared parts of Scandinavia with the indigenous Sami people, whose methods of spirit work contributed important components of Norse spiritual belief and religion. Sami people often traded with and married Norse people, establishing diverse communities that flourished, thanks to economic and cultural exchange.

Norse tribes traded not only with their Germanic cousins, but with Slavic, Celtic, and Mediterranean groups as well. They fought battles for territory against invading tribes from Central Asia in the fifth century CE. The Germanic tribe known as the Vandals traveled and settled as far south as North Africa and Norse sailors would follow during the Viking raids of the ninth century. In the tenth century, Ahmad ibn Fadlan, a Muslim ambassador from Baghdad, visited the Rus tribe to meet with their king. He penned a book of observations about Norse society that became an important historical text, as well as the basis of Michael Crichton's novel *Eaters of the Dead* (Knopf, 1976), which blends Fadlan's journey with a retelling of *Beowulf*. Also in the tenth century, Norse sailors from Greenland made it to Canada, "discovering" North America centuries before Columbus set sail.

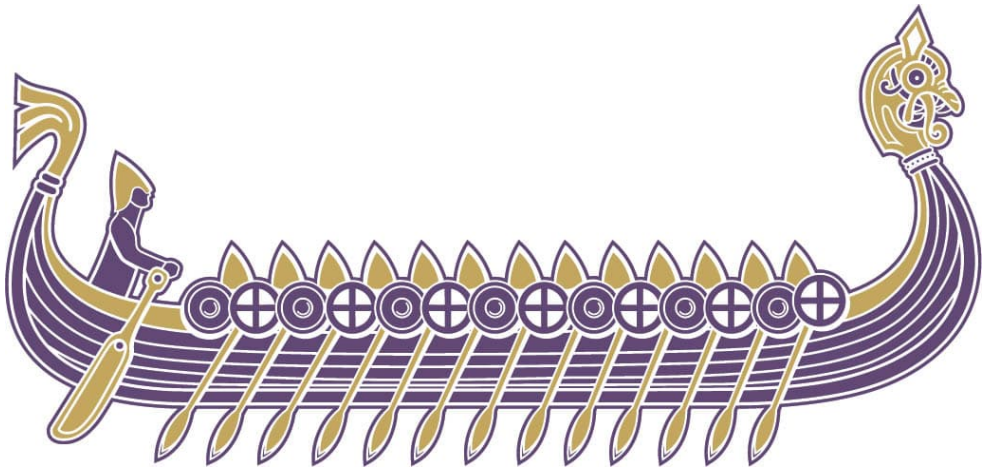
Thus, a great deal of historical evidence suggests that Norse society was not homogenous and insulated, but instead traded with and carried out warfare against peoples from at least three other continents. In times of peaceful trading and cultural exchange, intermarriage between the clashing cultures was common. Archeological and genealogical evidence suggests that people from other regions settled in parts of Scandinavia.

THE REAL VIKINGS

The Vikings depicted in popular culture are armored raiders, often pillaging villages mercilessly and in a frenzy. Over time, many people have come to imagine that this was all that Norsemen did for a living! While there is some truth in that, this was not always the case.

During the Dark Ages after the fall of Rome (between 400 and 500 CE), Norse tribes were thriving in Scandinavia. However, as communities grew and power was consolidated by kings, it became harder and harder for people to secure enough land and resources for their own family or clan. This was a major contribution to the Migration Period in Europe (as early as 300 to as late as 800 CE) and prompted the start of the Viking raids. "Viking"—meaning someone who sails long distances and raids—became an occupation of choice for about 10 percent of the Norse population, often for younger sons of a family wealthy enough to fund the expedition. Sailing in shallow-bottom longboats, which were rowed by the crew and could

travel large bodies of water or smaller rivers, Vikings journeyed across Europe and North Africa. Most of the expeditions were raids, voyages made with the explicit intent to pillage foreign or neighboring tribes, claiming land to settle and farm on, while others were focused on peaceful trading.



Far from being an inherently violent culture, Nordic society placed a high value on honor, community, and law. The prominence of clans and tribes meant that people lived interdependently in communities that cooperated with one another for common prosperity. The focus on family honor sometimes led to conflict, and if a member of a family was murdered by another clansman, it could start a blood feud between clans in which fathers and brothers would seek revenge for their fallen kinsman. Legal systems existed to judge if such killings were legitimate or honorable, and whether the issue of a lost family member could be resolved by paying monetary reparations to the victim's family, rather than inciting a lengthy and violent blood feud. While there was not always a king or lawyer available to arbitrate, the existence of such detailed laws on the subject speaks to the threat that a large blood feud could pose to a community.

The Migration Period, or *Völkerwanderung*, roughly between 300 and 800 CE, was one of great upheaval in Europe as many empires and tribes fought over territory. It began when Attila led the Huns from Central Asia to Europe, where they began raiding both the Germanic tribes and the Roman Empire. Losing territory to the Huns pressured the Germanic tribes to expand westward, and they started to take over Roman territory as well. This began a vicious cycle, whereby the Germanic people gained more land as the Roman Empire lost power, which contributed to the latter's collapse. As this period continued, Norse and Slavic tribes also expanded their territory and trade routes.

A PORTRAIT OF NORSE SOCIETY

Many aspects of Norse mythology and spirituality seem mysterious from our modern viewpoint because they emerged from a culture very different from our own, which has been influenced by postmodern religion. For example, why does Norse myth say that the Universe was created by a giant cow? And why are cows associated with the prosperity rune, Fehu? By looking back at the Norse way of life, we can see that cattle were incredibly valued as providers of nourishment and were traded in much the same way we trade stocks and investments today. So, it makes sense that cows would carry a sacred symbolism.

RELIGION

While a wide array of deities appears in Norse mythology, not all of them were actively worshiped. People mainly prayed and made offerings to the gods and goddesses Freyr, Thor, Freyja, Frigga, and Odin, with the favored god varying between different regions; for example, worship of Freyr was especially prominent in what is now Sweden. While there was no central authority in Norse religion, organized religious activities were often led by kings or priests, who acted as intermediaries between the community and the gods.

In addition to building temples as places of worship, Norse communities also designated sacred tree groves that were holy to the gods, which were protected and not subject to logging or hunting activities. Given that Norse mythology says that humans were created from trees, perhaps there was an element of ancestor veneration in this practice as well. Burial sites were also considered holy and were favored by sorcerers and sorceresses as locations ripe to obtain the wisdom of the honored dead.

ECONOMICS

The Viking longboats that facilitated sailing, trade, exploration, and the expansion of Norse tribes, were themselves the expensive product of a robust economy. Beyond logging to harvest wood and craftsmen to build the ship, sailing was deeply dependent on the work of shepherds and weavers to provide cloth for sails. A single sail could require the wool of seven hundred sheep and hundreds of hours of labor to process the wool into thread and weave the final product. In fact, sails were harder to produce than the boats themselves.

Management of livestock, particularly sheep and cows, was a backbone of the Norse economy. Dairy farming produced milk, cheese, butter, and yogurt, while sheep's wool and crops, like flax, provided fiber for weaving textiles. Women would often run the family farms and oversee the production and trade of goods, especially if the men held occupations that kept them away from home often.

Finally, craftsmen and blacksmiths produced some of the best jewelry and weaponry in Europe. Gold pieces featuring interlaced designs became

popular, and blacksmiths incorporated techniques from as far away as Egypt and China to create stronger and more elaborate weapons and armor.

GENDER ROLES

Typically, Norse and Germanic women had more rights and autonomy than many of their counterparts in other regions of Europe at the time. Tacitus, the Roman historian, reported in 98 CE that women in the Germanic tribes did not marry until around age eighteen to twenty, while girls in the Roman Empire often married at age twelve or younger. Impressively, women were permitted to offer their opinions in public forums and court proceedings, enjoying respectful treatment and holding a good deal of power in their communities. While men were often away sailing, trading, or fighting, Norse women oversaw the home, finances, and all the businesses the family owned. In fact, Viking raiders would bring their spoils home to their wives and mothers who would decide what portion of the proceeds to give back to him for his own spending—an allowance of sorts. While women could also initiate divorce and remarry if they were no longer pleased with their husbands, most women were expected to marry as a matter of familial obligation.

As evidenced by Norse burial sites, women had other occupations open to them. Some women were hunters, warriors, and sailors right alongside the men and were buried with their weapons and other symbols of prowess. The most lavish women's graves are typically those of sorceresses (who will be discussed more in **chapter two**, on **this page**). These women were enormously revered in their communities and could demand high prices for their services.

Still, despite their relatively egalitarian treatment, literature from the period suggests that men still saw women's roles and activities in the home as lesser (or at least, unmasculine), and avoided them when possible. The pressure for men to project strength and masculine interests is clear from the limited literature that survives from the period.

THE NIGON WYRTA GALDOR

The Nigon Wyrta Galdor, otherwise known as the Anglo-Saxon Nine Herbs Charm, is an Old English galdr, meaning an incantation or chant, used for healing illness and injury. The ancient Norse called upon nine sacred herbs to defeat obstacles. First, gather up nine herbs for the spell. You can use plants that are meaningful to you, but here are some suggestions that reflect what the Norse might have used:

- **Leek:** Extremely magical in Norse herbalism
- **Mugwort:** A common herb, excellent for consecration
- **Chamomile:** Used for sleep, dream divination, and love spells
- **Fennel:** Used for protection and blessings
- **Plantain:** Used in healing spells
- **Oak Leaf:** Associated with Thor and calls for protection
- **Chervil:** Used for purification
- **Flaxseeds:** Attracts prosperity and wards off evil
- **Apple seeds:** Used to invoke the power of Yggdrasil and the gods

You'll also need a square of cloth to make a small satchel. Linen works very well, as it is made from flax, which the Norse thought to have sacred properties. Put a pinch of each herb in the center of your satchel. As you do so for each herb, chant:

I ask you, [name of herb], to protect me
and nurture good health this year.

Once all nine herbs are placed, exhale over them three times to enliven them. Secure the corners up into a bundle. Wear the satchel on your person to reap its blessings.

THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL

As time went by, Christianity came to Northern Europe and the process of religious conversion began to overshadow and erase many facets of Norse spirituality. Important mythological stories were being lost because they were recorded with edits and inaccuracies by Christian monks, so the bard Snorri Sturluson created *The Prose Edda* in the thirteenth century to preserve the stories and culture of his people. *The Poetic Edda*, containing an older body of mythology, was not rediscovered until an unsuspecting farmer in western Germany found it in a barn in 1643. These tomes are essential to understanding Norse life, so we will dig deeper into the Eddas in **chapter four** (**here**).

When the Romantic movement swept Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, intellectuals and artists popularized a fixation on nature and the distant past, which led to a resurgence of interest in mythology. Norse myths became the inspiration for successful stage plays such as Wagner's *Ring* cycle, which brought the old gods and heroes back into the public imagination. During this time, esotericism and spirituality were also taking new forms in Europe. New "secret societies" like the Golden Dawn and the Theosophical Society were bringing back older magical practices, or creating new ones based on the synthesis of Western and Eastern philosophies.

You may know certain pieces of Wagner's *Ring* cycle by ear, such as "Twilight of the Gods" or "Ride of the Valkyries." They remain popular, dramatic, full-orchestra pieces. Divided into four parts, they tell a story of the Germanic folk hero, Siegfried. Popular fixtures in Norse mythology—like Wotan (the Germanic name for Odin), the Valkyries, Valhalla, dragons, and Dwarves—all make appearances in the titles of his dramatic musical saga.

The Norse gods and tales continued to grow in popularity over time. A resurgence of interest in witchcraft and paganism started in the late 1950s and contributed to the reconstruction of Norse paganism, which was often

called heathenry. The Elder Futhark runes also became recognizable in their own right as a divinatory and magical tool (see **chapter 3** on **this page** for more on runes). Historical research and modern innovations continue to facilitate the evolution of Norse religion, magic, and spirituality today.

CHAPTER 2

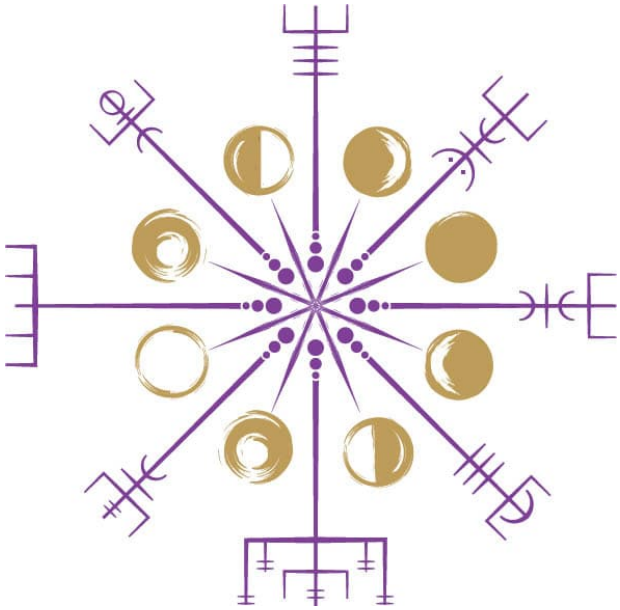
MYSTIC PRACTITIONERS

Because the influence of Christianity arrived late in Northern Europe, Norse magic and mysticism remained strong throughout the Viking period in the Middle Ages. Historical records, such as the Eddas and sagas (which are previously mentioned books of ancient poetry), reveal how common these practices were in daily life; not only were magical practitioners common and respected but lay people also knew some spells and rituals that they would employ when the situation called for it.

There are several distinct types of Norse magic, each associated with different techniques and goals. Depending on their specialty, magical practitioners went by different names, the most common being *völva*, a staff-carrying sorceress, and *vitki*, a wise man or sorcerer.

SEIÐR AND SPÁ: THE MAGIC OF FREYJA

The magical practices of *seiðr* and *spá* (anglicized as *seidhr* and *spae*) were usually, though not exclusively, practiced by women. In the Norse myths, they were associated with the Norns and the Vanir gods, especially Freyja. Seiðr is a spiritual art that allows the practitioner to enter a trance to commune with spirits and cast spells; these *seiðrkona* (seidhr wives, or women who practice seiðr) were believed to be able to channel power from spirits, send their souls out in the form of animals, and affect the minds and souls of others. Spá, meanwhile, referred to methods of divination which allowed sorceresses to directly view a person's *wyrd*, which loosely translates to "fate," as the Norns were weaving it (see **here** for more on Norns).



ORACULAR TRANCE

Seiðr and spá both used trance and meditation heavily. This could take the form of *utiseta* (which means "sitting out"), wherein the sorcerer would sit or lie out alone at night in a place of power, such as a sacred grove of trees, remaining silent to hear the spirits and receive wisdom. In public ceremonies, sorceresses might instead enter a trance while assistants sang or beat drums to call forth spirits for her and facilitate her entering an altered state of consciousness. In this way, people could pose questions to the sorceress to be answered by spirits. In some cases, she may have channeled answers directly by embodying the spirit.

SPIRIT MAGIC

In addition to providing divination and prophecy, seiðr facilitated powerful spells. Sorceresses were known to weave spells into battle flags for victory or weave a curse into a shirt to kill an enemy. They could heal, or cause, supernatural afflictions that damaged the body and the soul. Sorceresses were also said to fool the eye with illusions, induce states of frenzy, or even cause amnesia. Love magic, herbal magic, and weather magic were also part of seiðr. Much of this magic was achieved with the use of a sacred staff of wood or iron, often crafted to resemble a weaver's distaff (which resembles modern-day brooms in some ways). Weaving, both literal and metaphorical, was highly associated with these arts since the Norns were thought to weave men's fates. In fact, when the Catholic church was attempting to convert Scandinavia, they banned women from humming or singing while doing textile work, fearing that they might be casting such spells.

WYRD: THE TAPESTRY OF FATE

Norse sorceresses were renowned for their ability to read and influence fate, or *wyrd*. While modern perspectives equate fate with predestination, in which all outcomes are already decided, this is not how Norse culture viewed it. Wyrd is like a tapestry being continually woven by the Norns, and we have (and have always had) the power to participate in the process. The events of the past can create constraints on us, making some outcomes more or less likely, but we navigate these to determine our own destination.

GALDR: THE MAGIC OF ODIN

Galdr, meaning song or incantation, was a method of casting spells using melody. While seiðr made use of music as a way to induce a trance or call forth spirits, galdr songs were spells cast using specific lyrics and hymns. Galdr songs were often used in conjunction with the runes, usually by singing the names of the runes aloud as they were carved or painted to charge them with power. According to the myths, Odin created the techniques of galdr after his initiation into the runes by the world tree. It is said that he taught the runes and galdr to Freyja in exchange for her teaching him seiðr. This exchange helped strengthen both the Aesir and the Vanir.

RUNIC MAGIC

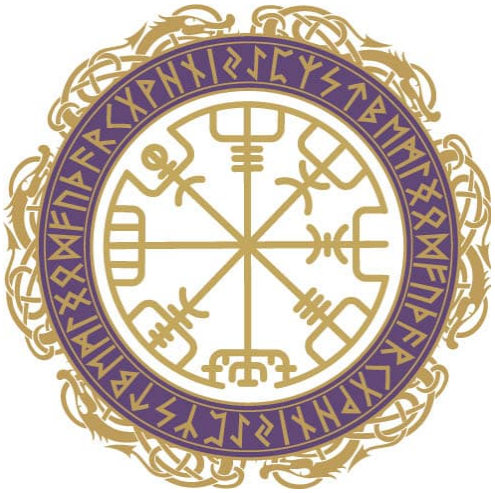
The runes were an important component of many Norse spells and are frequently mentioned in surviving texts from the period. Runes were carved into animal horns, weapons, and armor to strengthen warriors for battle, and could be employed for general protection as well. In Sigrdrífumál, the section of *The Poetic Edda* recounting the adventures of the hero Sigurd (also called Siegfried), the Valkyrie Brynhildr speaks of carving or painting the runes onto the body or everyday objects for uses as broad as healing wounds, promoting marital fidelity, and protecting ships at sea. Another incident in one of the sagas recounts how a sorceress carved runes into a log, which was then floated downriver to deliver a curse to the neighboring clan. We'll dive deeper into runes in **chapter 3**.

CHANTING AND SINGING

Norse people believed that the breath was a sacred expression of one's spirit. Therefore, their magic put a strong emphasis on the use of the voice while casting spells (which continues today in the practice of Trolldom, see **here**). While the melodies used in ancient galdr songs have been lost, surviving texts describe how singers would modulate their voices in different ways, keening at a high pitch or perhaps switching to a low drone, to fit the spell being sung. Galdr spells were sung to aid in childbirth, to strengthen warriors going into battle, or to protect an area from intruders. Sorcerers were sometimes brought to the battlefield to sing galdr, which would cause misfortune to befall enemy troops.

THE VOLVA PRACTITIONERS

The volvas (*völvas* in Old Norse) were some of the most prominent practitioners of magic in Norse and Germanic society, at least as early as the Roman period (27 BCE through 476 CE). These staff-carrying sorceresses served as seers, offering prophecies to kings and farmers alike. The Roman historian Tacitus recounts in the *Germania* how women were regarded as having innate magical gifts in Germanic tribes, and that seeresses were treated as holy people. This continued to be true through the Viking period in the Middle Ages. Volvas were highly renowned and able to travel freely knowing that they would be hosted as honorable guests wherever they went and paid well for their services, if called upon. Similarly, the Norse myths recount how even the wise Odin would call upon the assistance of various volvas, including his wife, Frigga, when he needed help.



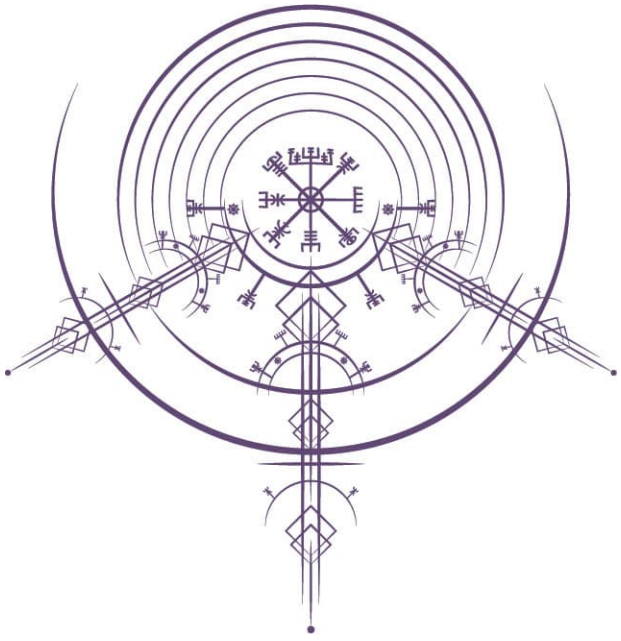
Thanks to archeological discoveries and detailed information from the sagas, we know a fair amount about how the volvas went about their work. While many women in Norse society could have basic knowledge of magic, volvas learned their craft through apprenticeship to an older, more experienced sorceress. Apprentices likely traveled with their teacher, serving as assistants in her work while they honed their skills. *The Saga of Erik the Red* (which is a thirteenth-century story about Norse exploration of the Americas) includes a detailed account of a volva being called upon. The procedure resembles a modern seance, with the volva sitting on a high seat and positioning her staff such that it touches the ground at one end and her

head at the other. Entering a trance while the women of the family sing, she converses with the spirits to advise the family on how to secure more food for the winter.

Archeologists have uncovered lavish burial sites for volvas, who were laid to rest with their tools. These include the staff, beaded necklaces, lambskin cloaks with blue lining, the color of magic at that time, hats lined with catskin, which are sacred to Freyja, and belt pouches filled with various talismans and seeds for psychotropic plants. Poisonous henbane seeds have been found in several tombs; these may have been used for weather spells to call down rain, or perhaps they were burned to create a smoke that would induce hallucinogenic states that promoted the spiritual practices.

MAGIC, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

It's not difficult to see that the practice of magic in Norse society was gendered in specific ways. While the use of galdr and the runes seems to have been carried out by male and female practitioners alike, seiðr and spá were considered to be typically feminine occupations. Though volvas were held in high regard, by the end of the Viking era, men who practiced seiðr were held with great suspicion and were derogatorily labeled *ergi*, meaning "unmanly." A man accused of performing seiðr, or simply called ergi, would have to win a duel to defend his honor or suffer possible banishment from his tribe. Based on this dramatic evidence, it was often assumed that Norse practitioners of magic were subject to strict gender roles. However, continued research has challenged this assumption. Tales like *The Saga of the Volsungs* include male seiðr practitioners who were highly respected in court, and early uses of the word ergi are less stigmatized, carrying the connotation of "surrender" or "receptivity" in channeling spirits and magical power. Examining historical shifts in Norse society from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages reveals that as standards of masculinity shifted, so too did the ergi practices of seiðr being regarded as too feminine for men to engage in while preserving their honor. The increasing influence of Christianity (and its propensity to have men lead spiritual practices) likely played a significant role in this shift.

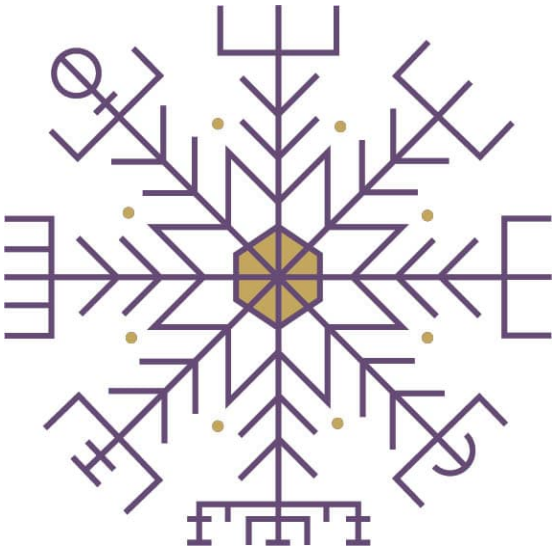


Furthermore, several burial sites belonging to honored volvas have been found to contain male skeletons. Though this came as a surprise to archeologists, it makes sense when we consider the roots of spirit work and seiðr. Transgender and gender non-conforming people often found roles as spirit workers and magical practitioners in early Northern Europe, and this likely continued for some time in Norse society. Descriptions of male sorcerers as *seiðberenðr*, literally "magic womb," could possibly refer to transgender men or women. The Norse myths also suggest that Odin, the sorcerer-god who learned seiðr from Freyja, changes his gender often and may have engaged in same-sex relationships or "alternative" sexual practices in his pursuit of magical power. Therefore, in earlier times it may be that Norse sorcerers and sorceresses had some latitude in exploring the fluidity of gender and sexuality.

HOLIDAYS AND SEASONS

Although several Old Norse holidays are attested to in the writings of Snorri Sturluson and others, we don't have a complete picture of what religious or spiritual holidays may have been celebrated at that time. However, modern practitioners of Norse religion and magic mark a variety of occasions, including some drawn from the Primstav calendars of Scandinavia in the Middle Ages.

Primstav calendars, which were popular in the Middle Ages, were a type of Norwegian calendar recorded on a stick. It was updated as time passed. It was typically used on farms to mark certain important dates that related to key times for livestock and crops. Many of these dates corresponded with pagan holidays and marked the changing of the seasons. These records later evolved to incorporate runic markings and became a natural diary of events throughout the year.



Below is a selection of seasonal holidays that newcomers to Norse mysticism may wish to observe.

Vinterdagen (October 14): The first day of winter. The colder climate of Nordic countries is such that traditional calendars saw the year divided into just summer and winter.

Alfablot (October 21): This was a holiday celebrated privately by families to honor the male ancestors and the spirits of the land and home.

Modraniht (December 20): Celebrated on the eve of the winter solstice, *Modraniht* means "Mother's Night" in Anglo-Saxon. This holiday honors the female ancestors, particularly those who serve as protective spirits for the lineage.

Yule (December/January): The date for this holiday varies since Yule was traditionally celebrated on the first full moon after the winter solstice. Many modern Christmas traditions (such as the burning of a log, eating ham, and singing carols) have their basis in Yule celebrations.

Disablot (February 22): Disablot was a major festival celebrated in Norse communities to honor the *disir*, a type of being that included the goddesses, norns, valkyries, and female ancestors.

Sommermol (April 14): The first day of summer in the Primstav calendar. This was a day for families to reaffirm their social bonds with gifts and agreements, and for farmers and shepherds to prepare for the agricultural work ahead.

Hexennacht (April 30–May 1): Hexennacht, or "Witches' Eve," was said to be the night when witches would fly out to Mount Brocken to dance the night away. The next day is May Day, a traditional time to seek out omens in nature (particularly love omens).

Sigurblot (June 21): Sigurd's Day is marked on the summer solstice to pray for victory, success, and prosperity. This holiday is named for the hero who slays the dragon Fafnir with the aid of the Valkyrie Brynhildr.

MAKING A MODERN PRIMSTAV

Making your own Primstav is a great way to root the ancient traditions of Norse spirituality into modern life. The dates recorded on historical Primstavs were usually centered on agricultural tasks such as planting, herding, and harvesting, and reflected the climate, both spiritual and literal, of Northern Europe during their time. Spend some time thinking about your environment, your lifestyle, and your spiritual practice. What dates are important to you? These should form the basis of your Primstav.

You may choose to include dates such as:

- Events that mark the turning of the seasons in your area (for example, the leaves changing color, a rainy season starting, the rising of a particular constellation in the night sky)
- Dates tied to the sun and moon, such as equinoxes, solstices, and full moons
- Traditional festivals celebrated by your family and ancestors
- The birthdays of family members who have passed on
- Major holidays, such as New Year's Day

Once you have your dates planned, make your own Primstav calendar on paper first, and then construct a wooden one using a length of wood from a craft or home improvement store (or even a yardstick!). Mark your dates by creating symbols that represent these important days, much like the ancient Norse did with runes, and place them on your wooden staff using markers or a woodburning tool.

CHAPTER 3

RUNES: THE ELDER FUTHARK

Runes are a set of symbols that make up the ancient Norse alphabet. Typically, the symbols were written or carved on small stones or pieces of wood. While there are countless ways to use runes in modern times, they are most commonly cast as part of a divination practice that often appeals to people who practice soothsaying in other forms, such as tarot and astrology. Runes can also be used alongside meditation practices and other forms of magic, such as incorporating the symbols into candle magic, protection spells, or other forms of modern sorcery. In the proceeding chapter, we will take an introductory look at each of the runic symbols, what they meant to the Norse people, and how to use them today.

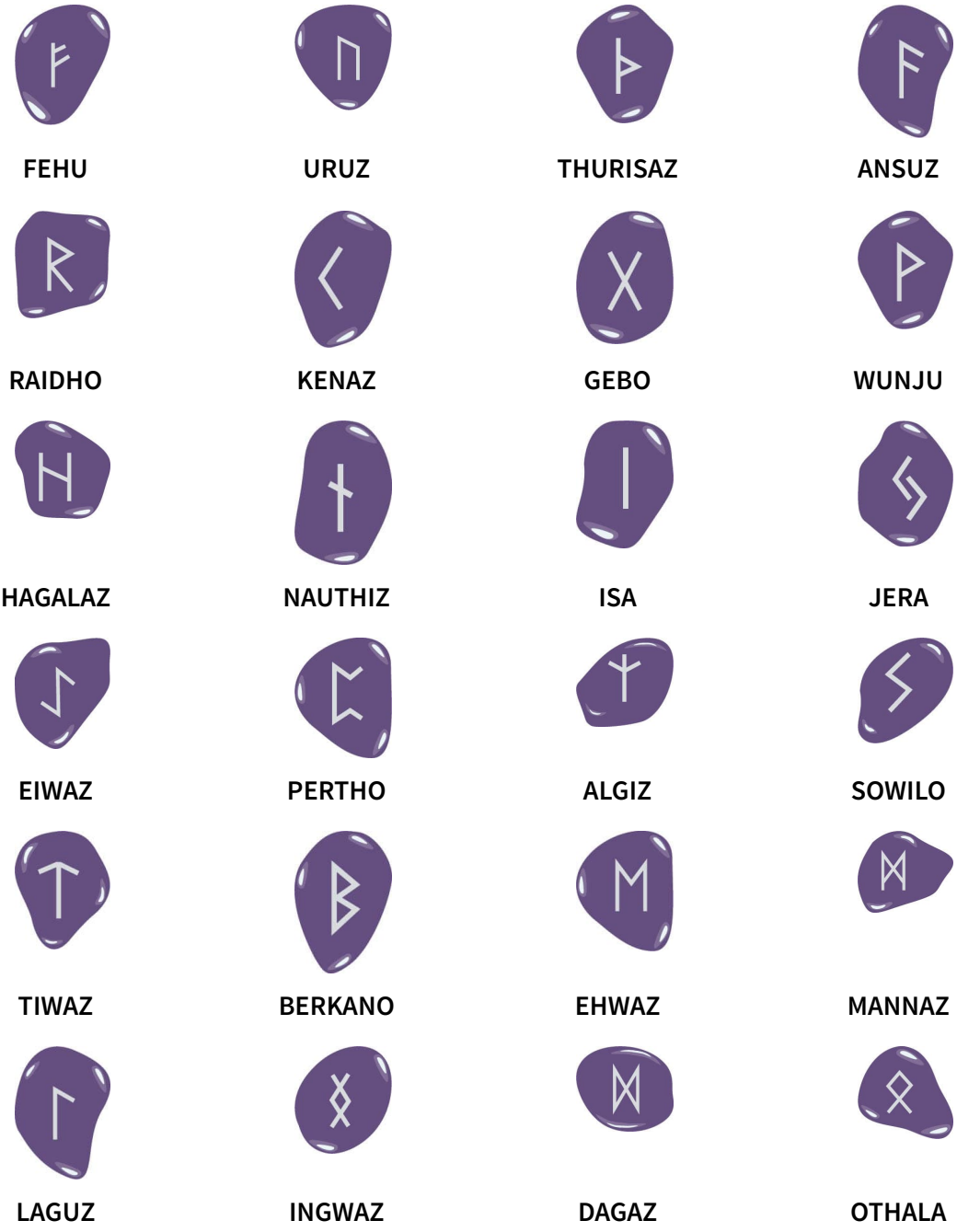
THE ORIGINS OF THE RUNES

The runes are a set of writing systems that originated with the Germanic and Celtic tribes, likely between 0 to 200 CE. The Elder Futhark was their first iteration, consisting of twenty-four letters that used straight-line forms ideal for carving on surfaces of wood and stone. Over time, the runes evolved into the Scandinavian Younger Futhark, and the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc, while knowledge of the Elder Futhark faded away until their revival in the nineteenth century.

Norse myth tells us that the runes are as old as the world itself. Urdr (see **here**), the oldest and wisest of the Norns, carved them into the roots of Yggdrasil, the world tree. Later, when Odin comes seeking knowledge, he spears his foot and hangs from the tree for nine days and nine nights, until

the runes come “rushing, screaming up” at him from below, where the roots touch the waters of the Well of Origins.

We know that the Elder Futhark was used not only as a written alphabet but for spellcasting as well. *The Poetic Edda* refers to rune spells for victory, midwifery, counteracting poison, and more, while the Bergen rune sticks uncovered in 1955 in Norway included a love spell and protection charm. The evidence for divinatory uses comes primarily from Tacitus, who visited the Germanic tribes and wrote a book on their culture in 98 CE, titled the *Germania*, also mentioned in earlier chapters. In it, he described the Germanic leaders taking auspices by cutting a tree branch into strips or slices, inscribing symbols on them, and throwing these over a cloth to read the pattern, hence, rune sticks. It is widely assumed that these symbols were the Elder Futhark, though we cannot know for certain. Still, Tacitus’s account became an important basis for recreating runic divination in modern times.



Some of the symbolism of the runes was recorded in the rune poems. These poems list each letter of the runic alphabet—specifically the Younger or Anglo-Saxon runes—and follow with a stanza that provides a mnemonic device for remembering its meaning. The poems helped preserve literary and cultural knowledge of the runes and hint at spiritual insights we can still use today. As you take your learning of the runes deeper, I recommend

reading them and meditating on their meaning to create personal associations for your own magical practice, should you choose.

A COMPLICATED REVIVAL OF THE RUNES

After Scandinavia converted to Christianity, the runes were gradually phased out as a writing system. When Norse mythology became popular in the Romantic period, those interested in magic and spiritual practices began reevaluating the runes as a possible source of wisdom. Guido von List, an Austrian esotericist, incorporated the runes extensively into his Arisophy society, a group that applied occult and spiritual theories to argue for Aryan supremacy. In addition to using the runes for such an immoral and reprehensible purpose, List presented them in a highly inaccurate form; his socalled "Armanen runes" consisted of only the Younger Futhark runes and one he made up himself. In fact, the book even erroneously paired some of the runes with the wrong names, making them wholly inaccurate on many levels.

Considering List's misrepresentation of the runes, you might consider it a wonder that they occupy a special place in Norse spirituality today. Thankfully, while few people would associate List with the runes, many might instead associate them with J. R. R. Tolkien, who used the runes in maps and illustrations for *The Hobbit* (Allen & Unwin, 1937) and The Lord of the Rings (Allen & Unwin, 1954–1956), as the alphabet of the dwarves. Subsequent editions replaced the runes with a new alphabet invented by Tolkien, but the extensive influence of Norse mythology on Lord of the

Rings helped to create more visibility and curiosity about the runes in modern-day audiences.

Norse myth and the runes continued to appear in other popular works like The Chronicles of Narnia (HarperTrophy, 1950–1957) and The Mighty Thor comics (Marvel Comics, 1962–present). In the 1970s, the first heathen organizations were founded to practice Norse neo-paganism. Soon after, several magazines focused on the subject came into print. Over the next few decades, the runes became more popular alongside Norse paganism, and writers like Diana L. Paxson published classic books on how to use them for divination and magic. Today, the runes are one of the most recognizable sorcery tools found in witchcraft stores.

In 1955, a collection of over six hundred Medieval runic inscriptions on four-sided wooden staves was unearthed near Bergen, Norway. These "Bryggen Rune Sticks" are an invaluable source of information on how runes were used in magic and proved that their use as an alphabet lasted longer than previously thought, until at least the late fourteenth century.

THE ELDER FUTHARK RUNES

The Elder Futhark Runes are the earliest and most frequently used set of runes in Norse mysticism. What follows is a list of these runes, an image of each rune, and a brief description of what the most widely accepted meaning of the rune is. They are ordered in their Old Norse alphabetical order and the order in which they appear is as important as their meanings. Meditate on runes to unearth a deeper and more personal understanding of each rune.

Fehu is the first rune, an auspicious symbol of prosperity. Fehu represents cattle and other livestock, which were a critical source of wealth and food for Viking-era families. When Fehu appears in a reading, it can represent abundance or call our attention to the projects we invest our time and energy in.

Uruz is the rune of wild, untamed strength. Unlike the domesticated animals of Fehu, Uruz was equated with aurochs, the now-extinct wild oxen. In a reading, this rune can stand for health and healing, as well as rigorous defense. Uruz calls forth our passion and motivation to strive for our goals.

Thurisaz means "thorn" in Old Norse and was used as a symbol of Thor's hammer; it's a dual-natured rune of sharpness and harm. Just as a thorn hedge may cut us while protecting what lies within it, and a hammer can build as well as destroy, Thurisaz represents active defense and power that demands cautious use.

Ansuz is a rune of breath, words, and spirit. It represents the holy voices of our gods and spirits. It calls us to still ourselves and listen carefully. This rune can signify an omen or message in a reading or suggest that your situation demands that you listen well and speak the truth.

Raidho is the rune of roads and journeys. Vehicles like carts, horses, and wheels are symbolized by this rune. Raidho can help us embrace our path, move gracefully through change, and determine the right course to follow. When Raidho appears in a reading, consider the roads open to you that can lead you to your goals.

Kenaz means "torch" in Old Norse and represents fire's role as a source of illumination and inspiration. Kenaz is the fire around which we gather to hear stories, the oven that bakes bread, and the spark of creativity that lights up our hearts. In a reading, Kenaz may signify intellectual and creative passions, especially those that are restorative to our spirit.

Gebo means "gift," and represents generosity and gratitude. Gift-giving, hospitality, and the maintenance of relationships were very important in early Norse culture. This rune can signify help coming your way, or opportunities to deepen relationships (or create new ones). Gebo invites us to give and receive with an open heart, valuing both ourselves and others equally.

Wunjo is the rune of joy and celebration. Happiness and harmony are represented here, from a parent holding their first baby to an annual Pride party. When Wunjo appears in a reading, it may be reminding us to keep reaching for fulfillment even after times of suffering.

Hagalaz is a more challenging rune, which represents fierce storms and hail. Just as ice storms are a serious hazard, Hagalaz heralds difficulties that force us to confront life's hardships. However, just as hail is a "seed" that melts back into life-giving water, Hagalaz promises renewal after the storm.

Nauthiz means "need" in Old Norse, signifying the most essential resources that sustain us. Fire against the cold, food for our hunger, and companionship for our loneliness can be represented by this rune. In a reading, it may harken hard times ahead, or remind us of the toil and constraints inherent in our lives.

Isa is the rune of ice and stillness. Just like the silence of a pristine snowy landscape at night, Isa invites us to pause and reflect (or it will create constraints that force us to do so). When Isa appears in a reading, consider whether you would benefit from slowing down instead of acting right away, or whether you tend too much toward indecision and overthinking.

Jera brings us back to the joys of spring after three very wintery runes! Jera represents the seasons, the harvest, and the metamorphosis of blossoms into fruit. Jera appears in a reading to advise us to take stock of our long-term plans and represents the impact of cycles on our lives (whether it be the cycles of seasons, the moon, the school year, or anything else!).

Eiwaz represents the yew tree, which was revered across Europe and Asia in ancient times. Eiwaz symbolizes the balance of life and death. When Eiwaz shows up in your reading, it can herald the need for personal transformation and cultivating strong roots.

Pertho is associated with divination and games of chance. Pertho can represent coincidence, cause and effect, and the mysterious workings of wyrd (fate). When Pertho appears in a reading, look for unexpected connections or creative solutions to your situation.

Algiz has a three-pronged shape that resembles an elk's horns or the saw-sedge plant, which has leaves so sharp they can slice through hands if handled improperly. This rune represents vigilance, protection, and sacred spaces.

Sowilo is the rune of the sun and victory. When you pull Sowilo in a reading, it's a sign that your aims are close to being attained and that you are receiving the support you need.

Tiwaz is the rune of the god Týr, an honorable leader of the Aesir. This rune is associated with matters of honor, justice, and trust. Early Nordic culture prized loyalty to one's family and keeping one's word. In a reading, Tiwaz reminds us of the importance of our bonds and acting according to our values.

Berkano means "birch" in Old Norse, a tree often described as a "generous mother" in the Eddas and sagas. The birch tree provided bark for paper, wood for kindling, oil for healing, nuts for food, and sap for syrup and tars. This rune symbolizes regeneration, purification, and healing.

Ehwaz means "horse" in Old Norse and symbolizes partnership, speed, friendly spirit allies, or the skill of soul journeying (often called "hedge-crossing" by witches). It advises us to tune in intuitively to those we share our lives with or to act swiftly with great energy.

Mannaz represents humankind and the mortal world of Midgard (the realm of Yggdrasil on which we live). This rune symbolizes not only the potential within each individual but also the wider communities that we rely on for survival and fulfillment. Mannaz reminds us that each person has a gift that contributes something to the world and advises us to seek aid from others when needed.

Laguz is the rune of freshwater lakes and rivers. It symbolizes flow, psychic intuition, and emotions. Just as many things are concealed in the depths of water, Laguz helps us to see the thoughts and feelings concealed below the surface of our minds. In a reading, Laguz may suggest that we surrender control and "go with the flow," or explore the depths of a situation more fully.

Ingwaz means "meadow" and is shaped like a seed. The seed is held in the body of the soil until it's born and reveals its potential. In a reading, this rune can signify productive isolation, potential energy, or the possibility of good fortune doubling. Ingwaz calls us to draw healing from life's creative joys.

Dagaz means "day" in Old Norse and was associated with the summer solstice. This rune symbolizes culmination and happy endings but also new beginnings, reminding us that our story is never truly over. When Dagaz appears in a reading, it challenges us to find meaning in our day-to-day lives, and to seek out new directions if that meaning eludes us.

Othala, the final rune of the Elder Futhark, symbolizes home, family, and history. Othala calls us to celebrate our culture while sharing in the joy of tradition. In a reading, Othala symbolizes everything we come home to at the end of our journey and reminds us to invest in our personal lives.

MAGICAL USE OF RUNES

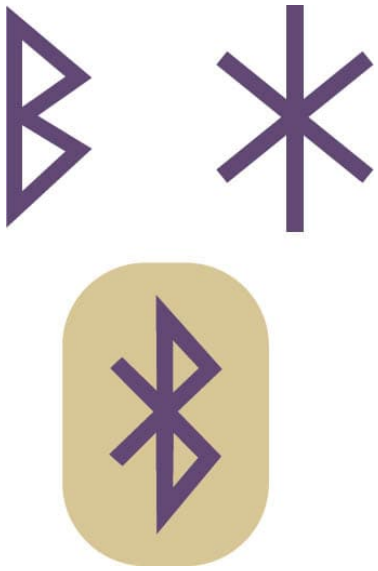
Working with the runes is a great entryway into practicing Norse paganism and spirituality. Unlike tarot, which has many cards with distinct meanings, the Elder Futhark has only twenty-four runes; this simplicity allows beginners to start easily, while experienced rune-workers can explore the deeper nuances and multiple facets of each one.

Getting started is as easy as procuring a set of runes from your local shop that specializes in magical practices. While wood is the most traditional material, you can find runes carved into stones, pieces of shed antler or horn, and other creative options. You can also make your own rune set by painting or carefully carving the runes onto thin wooden discs or blank game tiles from a craft shop. Regardless of whether you buy or make your rune set, greet each rune by chanting its name to call forth its spirit. Take three deep breaths and carefully blow out onto the rune on your exhale; this shares your breath and energy with them and helps bring them to life. You should also buy or make a pouch to store your runes in, and a cloth to read them on.

Take your time learning the runes and getting to know them. In the beginning, it's helpful to pull one rune a day (or even just one per week) from your rune pouch and focus on that rune exclusively. You might choose to research that rune, meditate on its meaning, or journal about your impressions of it. Chanting or singing the runes, a practice called galdr (see **here**), is also a wonderful way to attune to the runes. Remember that in Norse spirituality, breath and voice were thought to be expressions of spirit. Therefore, spending a few minutes chanting or singing the name of the rune at the beginning of the day is a powerful way to call in its energy and get a feel for it. If you try this, write down your observations at the end of the day; over time, you can look for patterns to see how that rune impacts your daily experiences.

The runes can also be used in spellwork, either alone or as part of a larger spiritual practice. You can start by picking out a rune that matches your goal, such as Fehu for prosperity in a money spell, and inscribing it on a card. Chant its name, breathe life into it, and tell it what you are trying to accomplish. This card can be placed under a candle during spellwork, carried in your wallet, or left out on your altar to bring its energy into your life. Recharge the card with your breath regularly and burn it when you're done to release its energy. If you practice candle magic, you can also carve runes into your candles the same way.

As you get more experienced with the runes, you can try combining one or more runes into a single symbol, called a bind rune. Merging the runes in this way helps to synthesize their powers, allowing you to call in a more specific energy for your spells. Bind runes originated as early as the second century and were popularized around 800 CE. They still commonly appear today in non-magical contexts; for example, the Bluetooth logo is a bind rune, being a marriage of the Berkano rune and the Ior rune (which is part of the Anglo-Saxon Futhark set of runes, rather than the Elder Futhark covered in this book).



DIVINATION WITH RUNES

Once you're comfortable with the basic meanings of the runes, spend some time connecting to your physical runes. Sleep with your bag of runes stuffed in your pillowcase to connect them to your psyche. Leave them out in the full moon to charge them with cleansing lunar energy. Feel any blemishes in the material they were made of. You can even do something as simple as tell them about your day.

I recommend keeping your runes in a drawstring pouch that you cannot see through (mine is purple velvet). Make sure the bag is large enough that you can shake it and the runes will jumble up in its interior.

At any point, you can try divination with runes. There are many ways for you to use runes in divination and fortune-telling, but here are three basic readings to start you off. Many of these tell the future, but remember, the Norse concept of wyrd didn't see the future as fixed or predestined, so it's helpful to read that rune as representing influences on what may happen, rather than a set outcome.

One-Rune Reading: The simplest reading, and a great way to get started, is to begin by pulling just one rune from your bag. This is also a great reading to help you learn each rune's independent meaning.

- Pull one rune a day from your bag to give you advice on how to conduct yourself when challenges arise.
- Pull a rune to answer a yes or no question.

Two-Rune Reading: Start by pulling two runes at a time from your bag.

- One to represent the situation and one to represent possible solutions or ways forward.
- One represents the past and the other, the future. They can also represent possible futures in a forking path.

Three-Rune Reading: A three-rune reading connects three aspects. Using runes like this helps you learn how the runes tell a story and how they interact with one another.

- Draw a rune for each of the past, present, and the future.
- Draw a rune to understand a problem, a rune for a possible solution, and a rune for why that solution works.

THROWING RUNES

Throwing runes is also known as casting runes. The most advanced method of reading the runes is to grab a handful from your pouch and gently toss them onto the reading cloth, a piece of fabric that you have deemed sacred for this purpose alone. Any runes that land faceup are part of the reading (while the facedown runes can be ignored or removed). This method relies on intuition and practice to interpret not just the meaning of the individual runes, but the patterns in which they fall.

- If several runes fall close together or touching, their influences may be related.
- If a rune lands far apart from the others, it may represent a distinct element of the situation.
- Runes that land atop one another may be in conflict.
- If an upright rune lands on top of a facedown rune, it could mean that there's either something you're not seeing or that something is being hidden from you.

With time, you can make this method your own based on your understanding and perspective.

CASTING RUNES

Begin your rune reading by setting up the space. Clean the surface you'll be using for your reading and then lay out a reading cloth (as described on **this page**). If you're asking the gods to lend their power or wisdom in your reading, leave them a suitable offering at the corner of your space in the form of a small portion of beer or honey.

Next, cleanse the runes so that no energy outside of this particular session is present or left lingering. This can be done with smoke by burning a wand of juniper or rosemary to cleanse the space, or through sound by singing, humming, chanting, or using percussive instruments like a bell or drums over your runes.

Once the space is set and before picking up your runes, ground yourself and formulate your question. You can do this by finding a comfortable seat and closing your eyes. Straighten your spine and keep your shoulders spread open and wide to open your heart without puffing out your chest. As you breathe, relax the muscles, and settle into your skin, formulate your question.

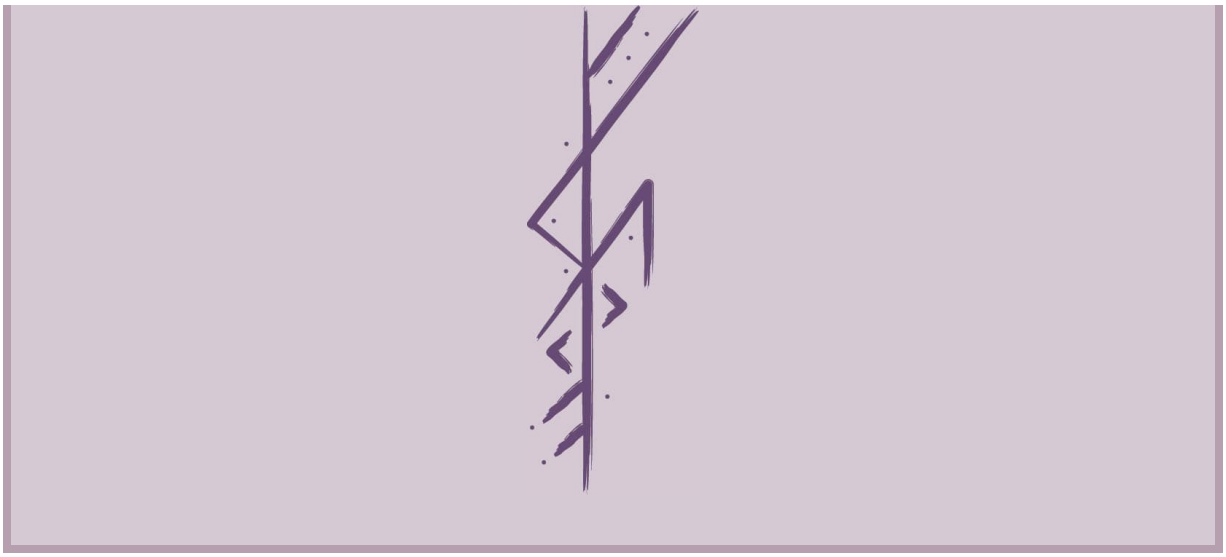
A good question will be specific while not looking for a "yes" or "no" answer. Center the questions on things that are within your control; for example, it's not appropriate to ask the runes to make someone love you, as that threatens their autonomy. Here are some examples of how to ask questions properly:

- How should I handle a checked-out boss at work?
- Should I move to a new city with my closest friend or stay where I am with my partner?
- How should I express how I feel about a situation with my sibling?
- Where is this strong emotion of mine coming from?

Once you have formulated a specific question, pick up the bag and shake it at least ten times. Ask your question—either out loud or in your head—at least three times while you do this. Slide your hand into the bag and pick out three to five runes that call to you. They may feel particularly warm or cold, or you may feel a surge of energy when you touch them. You can pull more than five if you feel strongly when you touch them.

Without looking at the runes, pull them out and cup them between two palms. Give them a rigorous shake (without losing any) and ask your question again. Toss your runes onto the surface of your reading cloth. Revisit the Throwing Runes section on **this page** for details on how to read the runes.

Write down the results to help create firmer associations as you practice. When you are done, you may cleanse your runes again and place them back in their bag. Dig a hole in your garden and bury the leftover honey and beer (or dispose of it as you normally would).



CHAPTER 4

NORSE POETRY AND KEY ELEMENTS

The surviving documents of Norse poetry are complex and difficult to understand, even when translated out of Old Norse. When hearing the myths and learning about the gods and goddesses in them, Old Norse people already knew many of the things covered in this chapter. They knew what to look for when a poet was trying to get the audience to guess a character was Odin in disguise and they knew the complex relationship between the nine realms and different factions of gods and goddesses. It took many years of study and exposure to the epics and sagas before the original ancient Norse audience could adequately tease out all the nuanced themes of the stories. Take your time while learning the basic settings and attributes of Norse mythology. Use this section as a reference to their factions to solidify your understanding as you dive into the world of Norse mythology and poetry.

SURVIVING TEXTS

Much of Norse mythology and the knowledge we have of Norse mysticism is primarily derived from the surviving source texts, such as *The Poetic Edda, The Prose Edda*, and the various sagas. Many of these epic poems were told as part of an oral tradition, or a story that was passed down orally from person to person for generations before being written down. These epics were both history and narrative meant to entertain and inform early Norse people.

Generally, the stories in these texts were performed in one of two ways: Poems called eddas were usually performed by an ensemble and were generally a rowdy affair. Skaldic poetry was performed by well-renowned

storytellers called *skalds* who were masters of the craft and strove to make the audience think. Skalds would frequently travel alone from town to town and perform some of these epics as a one-man show, while larger groups would perform the Eddas like a play, where each of them stood in for a single character.

The earliest texts that survive are largely preserved due to the introduction of Christianity in Norse territories and the way Christian scribes used the tools of their language to record these epics. It's important to remember that these monks had a different core culture, language, and way of life than the Norse, so we are seeing these stories through their eyes as well as the eyes of the Norse people themselves. While the ancient Norse did have an alphabet, the runes, and the runic letters weren't generally used in storytelling, as that was done orally. Norse poets who had converted to Christianity, like Snorri Sturluson (the author of *The Prose Edda*), blended their heritage and their faith by putting the poetry to paper.

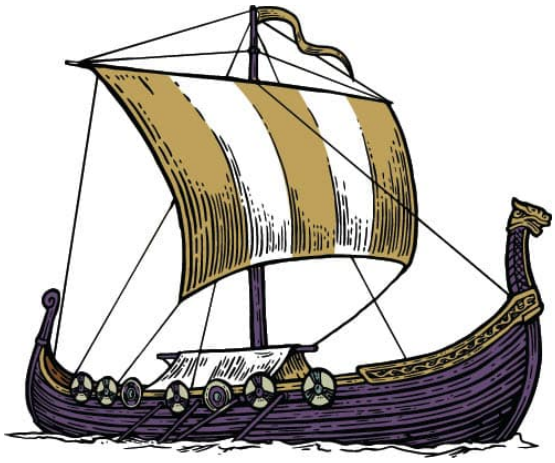
THE POETIC EDDA

The Poetic Edda as we know it today is an anonymously written collection of Norse poetry that includes stories of the origin of the Universe, the gods, and mortal heroes. Likely written in the 1270s, its whereabouts were unknown for several centuries until it was recovered in 1643. It was originally thought to be the older of the Eddas because Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson, the person who rediscovered it in 1643 (see **here**), thought that it was written by Sæmundr Sigfússon, who lived one hundred years before *The Prose Edda* was written. As such, it's also sometimes called *The Elder Edda* or *The Sæmundr Edda*. This has since been proven false and they likely were written by Norse Christians who were enthusiastic about the poetic tales at around the same time.

Whoever wrote *The Poetic Edda* was likely copying a manuscript that was written even earlier in the 1250s. The poems are separated into two sections: mythological poems and heroic poems. The mythological poems tell stories about the gods and the heroic poems tell the stories of early Germanic folk heroes, often with cameos from the Norse deities. Each of the poems usually introduces the characters at the beginning of the poem,

suggesting that it was written down for an audience unfamiliar with the characters and the stories.

Some of the most popular poems in *The Poetic Edda* are "Völuspá," The Volva's Prophecy, which tells the history of the gods, and "Lokasenna," Loki's Flyting, where Loki calls out all of the flaws of the other Aesir and they retaliate.



THE PROSE EDDA

The Prose Edda is the word of Snorri Sturluson, a bard who worked to preserve Nordic mythology in a format that would be acceptable to Christian church authorities in around 1216 CE. Simply calling Snorri Sturluson a bard, while accurate, doesn't quite do him justice. He was a political figure, a scholar, a historian, and adept at the Skald poetry style. He was born between 1178 and 1179 and was so revered that he was supposedly assassinated by the King of Norway.

It's debated whether the introduction of *The Prose Edda*—which argues for euhemerism when reading and interpreting ancient stories— was written by Snorri Sturluson or added after his death. Euhemerism, in this case, is the belief that the Norse deities were actually ancient Norse kings that were elevated through skald poetry to deific status. This means that *The Prose Edda* retells some stories from *The Poetic Edda* with some of the gods recast as honored ancestors. The changes to *The Prose Edda* from *The Poetic Edda* are minor, all things considered, but their slightly different interpretations indicate how Christianity aimed to reduce what were once

powerful gods and goddesses from something to be worshiped down to mere mortals and folk heroes.

The Poetic Edda **is derived from the *Codex Regius*. Written by hand on vellum (paper made from calfskin), it's densely written and uses shorthand for names repeated more than once in a poem to save space. Originally 106 pages, of which only 90 remain, it contains thirty-one poems that are some of the earliest source materials on early Germanic folklore and Norse mythology. Once rediscovered, the bishop that found it gifted it to the King of Denmark but has since been returned to Iceland circa 1971.**

KENNINGS IN NORSE STORYTELLING

Understanding the ancient Norse source texts, especially those that were performed by the Skalds, is made much easier once you understand their use of kennings. Kenning is the practice of using poetic metaphors to refer to characters and places that add a mysterious and riddle-like element to oral storytelling. Clever listeners were rewarded for decoding the bard's true meaning, but this makes the Eddas challenging for modern readers, as we lack a shared frame of reference. Snorri's *Prose Edda* is invaluable for its explanation of the kennings system.

Kennings' metaphors are formulaic in nature. They replace a noun with two or more parts that are often referential to Norse lore and mythology. For example, instead of saying "fire," a poet might say "sun of the home." Kennings extend to characters as well. Odin is sometimes referred to as "Lord of the Gallows" or "the Hanged Man" to refer to his deeds, and Loki is called "Wolf's Father" or "Father of the Sea Thread" due to his parentage of Fenrir the wolf and Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent.

Sometimes, if Skalds thought their audience was savvy to many of the tales they were telling, they would combine two well-known kennings to create a more complex riddle for their tales. For example, a kenning used for blood is “wound sea” and it’s meant to describe a dramatic and expansive loss of blood. A raven can be called a “swan of blood” because of their inclination to consume corpses on the battlefield. The two could be combined as “swans of the wound sea” to describe an unkindness of ravens (or a flock of ravens) on the battlefield.

Modern knowledge of kennings is almost exclusively thanks to the author of *The Prose Edda*, Snorri Sturluson. Two of the sections in *The Prose Edda*, “Háttatal,” Enumeration of Meters, and “Skáldskaparmál,” Language of Poetry, explicitly outline how to interpret kennings. Without this as a guide, it would be incredibly difficult to interpret Skald poetry.

FACTIONS

Much like humans, the gods in Norse mythology are divided into different factions. While all gods are powerful, each of the factions symbolizes something specific. The Aesir, the gods of the principal pantheon in Old Norse religion and mythology, are the most recognizable because they're the closest to humans. The Vanir, an older group of gods associated with fertility, wisdom, and the ability to see the future, are similar to the Aesir, but they symbolize where humanity connects to nature. The Jotnar are primordial beings with strength that often exceeds many of the gods and goddesses in other factions. They may also be referred to by the negative term *þurs* and are the furthest removed from humanity with abilities that mimic the raw forces of nature. Connections can be (and often are!) made with the different factions of deities. The energies that calling on the Aesir, Vanir, and Jotnar bring to spells, meditations, and general Norse practices are distinct and may grow and change the more they're worked with.

THE AESIR

The Aesir (or *Æsir* in Old Norse) are the heavenly gods who settled in Asgard after a war with the Vanir. They are what most people think about when they think of the Norse gods. Many of the characters that are familiar in Norse mythology are the Aesir gods, such as Thor, Odin, and Frigga. They're heavily involved in the mortal realm, much more than the other factions. These gods symbolize the way humans react to one another. They are also the warrior gods that symbolize loyalty, honor, and often squabble amongst themselves about what are the right battles to fight. All that being said, they're often otherwise preoccupied with tricking others to get what they want and playing pranks on each other.

When calling on the Aesir in spellwork, keep in mind that giving a small offering after performing a spell will motivate them to help. Aesir love mead, an alcoholic beverage made from fermented honey, so leaving some in a thimble or other small vessel near where you performed your spell will make working with them that much sweeter. They also love gold—as evidenced by the gilded city they are believed to reside in—so gifts of precious metals and jewels left on altars are always well received.

THE VANIR

The Vanir are the nature gods of Norse mythology, and there are a few theories on why they're distinct from the Aesir, despite being so physically similar. Some schools of thought think that the Vanir were the gods that were worshipped before the Aesir. Others think that the Vanir represented farmers and the Aesir represented explorers and adventurers.

We'll likely never know the true origin of the Vanir, but mythologically speaking, their home is in Vanaheim, one of the Nine Realms that are situated around the world tree, Yggdrasil. They symbolize the way humans interact with nature. Many of these gods are patron deities of fertility, the seasons, and crop growth.

THE AESIR-VANIR WAR

When the Aesir and Vanir were still establishing their footholds in the nine realms, a long war between the two factions began when a Vanir sorceress named Gullveig (which roughly translates to "drunkenness for gold") traveled to Asgard. The Aesir would say that Gullveig performed elaborate magical displays so that she could steal the Aesir's gold. The Vanir would say that the Aesir demanded Gullveig tell them the secrets of her golden magic and she refused. Either way, both stories include the Aesir throwing a tantrum and trying (and failing) to burn the sorceress alive three times.

When the sorceress returned to Vanaheim, both sides were enraged about how they were treated. The Aesir and the Vanir battled a long war where it was clear neither side would ever win. Locked in this power struggle, they formed a truce and they traded some of their strongest gods and goddesses to formally seal the peace. The Vanir twins, Freyr and Freyja, and their father went to Asgard, and Mimir and Hoenir, treasured advisors to Odin, were traded to Vanir.

THE JOTNAR

The Jotnar (also seen as *Jǫtunn* or *Jötunn* in Old Norse and pluralized as *Jǫtnar* or *Jötnar*) are immensely powerful beings in Norse mythology and are inherently tied to the natural world. Sometimes called giants, especially in the modern retellings of older myths, they are often in conflict with the Aesir and Vanir. While mistrusted by the Aesir and Vanir, they are not an inherently evil faction. They live in wild and hostile places and symbolize the forces of nature.

All Jotnar are descended from the first frost giant, Ymir. Most of them were eradicated by Ymir's tide of blood when Odin and his brothers slay him, a single Jotunn escaped unscathed and hence repopulated the realm that became their home, Jotunheim. Some larger Jotnar are the size of actual mountains while others are simply very tall. They are accustomed to the cold, unforgiving wilderness, and living in isolation. They are also intelligent and live in their own halls (the Old Norse term for a large gathering space for families) in sometimes large communities. Often fearful of Thor and his hammer, they can't resist tricking the Aesir and playing pranks.

YGGDRASIL AND THE NINE REALMS

Yggdrasil, otherwise known as the world tree, is a magnificent ash tree that unifies the nine realms of Asgard, Alfheim, Vanaheim, Muspelheim, Midgard, Jotunheim, Niflheim, Svardlhleim, and Helheim. These realms make up the universe where all Norse mythology takes place and informed Old Norse people of their place in it.

EXPLORING THE NINE REALMS

Consider the following your tour of the nine realms of Yggdrasil. Each location has its own residents and environment. No one realm rules all of the others and the order in which they will be presented will be from their location in the world tree, starting at the top and ending at the bottom.

Yggdrasil is knowable but also unfathomable. Much of what we know about it has either been lost or there are contradictions. While we know that there are nine realms and it's mentioned in the Eddas, there's no itemized list of them. The realms and their locations vary in the source materials and their artistic interpretations are often in flux as well.

Asgard: At the top, there's Asgard, home of the Aesir, the warrior gods and goddesses that fill many of the stories in Norse mythology. There are palaces (usually called halls in the myths) made of silver, gold, and other precious metals. While Asgard is mostly depicted in the branches of the world tree, one root of Yggdrasil resides in Asgard at Urdr's Well (see **here** for more on Urdr).

Alfheim: After Asgard is Alfheim (also called *Ljossalfheim, Ljósálfheim*, or *Ljósálfaheim*) home of the light elves and honored ancestors. It looks very similar to Midgard (the realm of the mortals, one step below here), but

it's much cleaner. It's also constantly sunny, as night never falls on Alfheim. We know from the surviving source material that Freyr of the Vanir rules over this realm, although the reasoning behind this is unclear. It rests in the limbs of the tree with Asgard and Vanaheim.

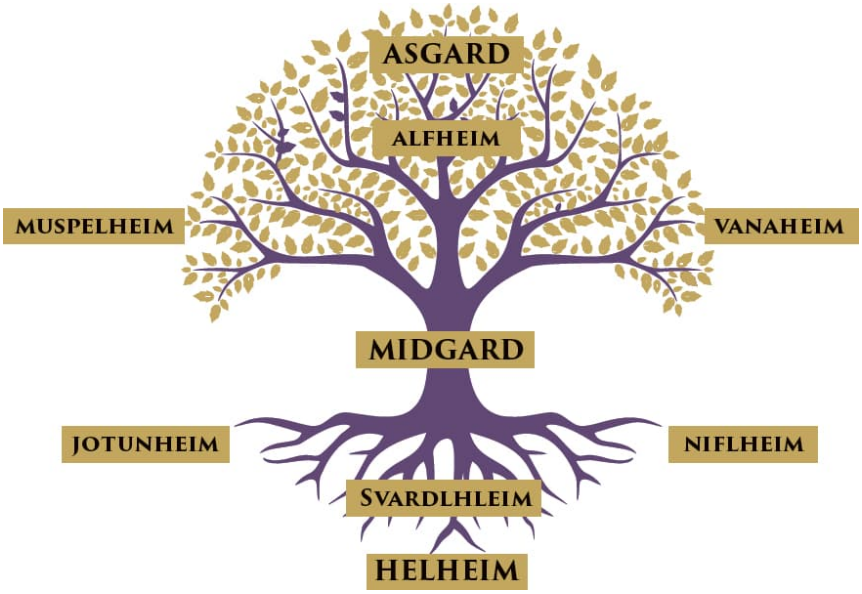
Vanaheim: Still in the limbs of the tree, there's Vanaheim, where the Vanir live. These are the nature gods and goddesses, and they live in a verdant paradise resplendent with natural beauty. The sun shines here, although not constantly, and the realm sits in the branches of the world tree, near Asgard.

Muspelheim: Next is Muspelheim, the land of fire, although where it resides specifically in Yggdrasil is difficult to discern. In fact, we don't have a lot of information about Muspelheim, but some of the source material indicates that fire giants and something like demons lived there. Surtr (which is sometimes anglicized to *Surtur* and means "black" or "swarthy one" in Old Norse) holds a position of power there until he scorches the earth at Ragnarok or apocalypse. Based on how the realm is named, it's likely that there was a proto-fire giant named Muspell that made this realm.

Midgard: Then comes Midgard, which is the mortal realm where humans live. Midgard is a flat disc that sits at the base of the trunk of Yggdrasil. It's loosely translated into "middle earth" or "middle enclosure" in Old Norse. The edge of the disc is the edge of the world where the seas rained down onto the roots of Yggdrasil. Around the edge of the disc, the Midgard Serpent Jörmungandr, which means "mighty snake," encircles the realm and bites on its tail. Asgard is connected to Midgard by a shimmering rainbow bridge called the Bifrost.

Jotunheim: Near Midgard and not yet underground is Jotunheim (*Jötunheimar* in Old Norse), which translates to "giant worlds." This implies that there might be more than one. It exists at the base of the tree alongside Midgard. The absolute wilderness of this realm is where the Jotnar live. Frost and mountain giants (which are sometimes a little different from the Jotnar proper) roam these lands.

Niflheim: Next, also amongst the roots of Yggdrasil, is Niflheim, the land of ice, mist, and fog. Frozen near solid and deeply inhospitable, only the gruffest of creatures live here. There is a mighty, ever-churning spring called Hvergelmir that is found here. From this great spring flows ten poisonous rivers, which only furthers the inhospitable nature of Niflheim.



Svardlheim: Tangled beneath the roots resides Svardlhleim (which is sometimes called Nidivilir), or the land of the dwarves and dark elves (which are sometimes considered to be the same type of creature). This realm is fully underground and entangled within the upper roots of Yggdrasil and has a climate similar to a cave: chilly and dark. Bioluminescent moss glows and provides all the light the dwarves need.

Helheim: Finally, at the base of the roots resides the realm of Helheim, the ninth and lowest world. The goddess Hel rules here but Helheim was likely a place before Hel descended to rule it. The road to Helheim is called the Helveg and this realm is where the dead who die of old age and sickness find their final rest. A wall of corpses surrounds Hel's hall, and three gates allow people entry: Helgrind, Nágrind, and Valgrind (which translate to "Hel-gate," "Corpse-gate," and "Carrion-gate" in Old Norse, respectively). It's a cold, dark, and quite dismal place to be, and the final root of the world tree is here.

THE ANATOMY OF THE WORLD TREE

Yggdrasil, the world tree, is fed and connected by three main things: three wells, three roots, and three gaps or bridges.

THE THREE WELLS

Yggdrasil is fed by the water of three wells. First is Mimir's well in Jotunheim, which is the Well of Wisdom. Things can be traded at the Well of Wisdom for a hefty price, and you must be willing to pay dearly to drink from its depths. Odin carved out one of his eyes for the wisdom of the runes and magic. Mimir's head, which was decapitated in a scuffle with the Vanir, sits in the well with Odin's eye. They are both preserved and see all, and Mimir's head still gives good counsel despite him being dead.

Urdr's Well is in Asgard and is also called the Well of Fate or the Well of Origins. The Aesir hold their most important council there while the Norns tend to the roots of the tree with clay and mud.

The final well is called Hvergelmir, or the Roaring Kettle. It resides in Niflheim and is the center of both Niflheim and the cosmos. Many poisonous rivers flow from the Roaring Kettle with names like Svöl (cool), Gunnthrá (battle pain), Fjörm (rushing), Slíd (dangerous), Hríd (storm), Sylg (slurp), Ylg (she-wolf), and Leipt (flash).

THE THREE ROOTS

The three roots are in Helheim, Jotunheim, and Midgard. Nidhogg, a Norse dragon, and agent of chaos, chews relentlessly on the root in Hel, attempting to escape the prison the roots hold him in. The roots feed the tree. The number of them ties in with the three bridges and three wells. The number three itself is holy in Norse mythology. The way the Norns take care of the tree roots (see **here**) by bathing them in mud is an ancient agricultural practice used in fruit groves. The Norns tending to the tree in this manner symbolizes fate caring for the entirety of creation.

THE THREE BRIDGES

The three bridges, or "gaps," are the Gjallar Bridge, the Bifrost (*Bilröst* in Old Norse), and the Ginnungagap. The Gjallar Bridge (or *Gjallarbrú* in Old Norse) is the bridge between the earth and the underworld. The Bifrost is the bridge between the world of the gods and the human realm that is guarded by **Heimdallr**. The Ginnungagap is the void at the beginning of the world between the realms of fire and ice where life first started to emerge. It's now where the Roaring Kettle resides.

They do not rebuild the old world but make something new in the ashes of what was there before, and the cycle starts anew.

SACRED ANIMALS OF YGGDRASIL

While the world tree holds the nine realms together, there are also several sacred animals that make their homes in the branches and roots of Yggdrasil. Some of them mean the tree harm, while others provide essential pieces of the mythical ecosystem. These animals show up in the epic Eddas, sagas, and skaldic poems.

THE BIRDS AND SQUIRREL

There's little information left in the surviving texts about the birds and squirrels of Yggdrasil, but they are nevertheless important. It's said that there's an eagle that rests in the branches of the world tree. Perched between its eyes is a hawk named Veðrfölnir (which translates to "wind-bleached" or "wind-witherer"). The eagle may be Hræsvelgr (which translates to "corpse swallower") in disguise, a Jotunn who guards one of the gates of Heaven and takes the form of an eagle, but it's not confirmed in the text of the Eddic poems where the eagle is mentioned.

A squirrel named Ratatosk, which means "bore tooth," clambers up and down from the branches to the roots of the tree. He's a horrible gossip and lies to both Nidhogg and the eagle to make them angry at one another for his own amusement. Ratatosk is an important symbol in teaching Norse mythologies. He symbolizes how stories can change across distances and also by who tells them. The squirrel's stature and the fact that it causes problems with two significantly larger creatures alludes to a theme in Norse

poetry where even the small can knock down the mighty if they're clever and mean-spirited.

They aren't necessarily tied to the tree, but ravens are a key symbol in Norse mythology. They're mentioned frequently in the Eddas and are revered for their intelligence and ability to carry messages. Odin himself has two talking ravens as messengers named Huginn and Muninn (which translates to "thought" and "memory").

THE STAGS AND GOAT

Hooved beasts also make their homes amongst Yggdrasil. The sections of the Eddas that talk about the goats and stags sometimes call Yggdrasil "Lerad" (also *Læraðr* in Old Norse or sometimes anglicized as *Lærad*), which is the tree that sits above Valhalla. Some of the language used seems to indicate that these two trees are one and the same.

Hooved beasts also make their homes amongst the branches and roots of the world tree. There are four stags that eat the leaves and bark of Yggdrasil. Stags were powerful, masculine-aligned symbols in Old Norse mythology (see **here** where it mentions Freyr killing a giant with only a stag horn). In addition, there's a hart, which is a type of hooved and horned deer-like creature, that sits above Valhalla. Its name is Eikthyrnir (*Eikþyrnir* in Old Norse) and it sits on top of the tree with a magical goat named Heidrun (*Heidrún* or *Heiðrún* in Old Norse). The hart and the goat eat

leaves from the tree and water that runs off their horns feeds into many rivers, including Hvergelmir, the ever-churning spring in Nifelheim.

The magical goat has four udders from which the finest mead flows. It nourishes the warriors of Valhalla every night after the battle they participate in every day.

THE DRAGONS

Symbolizing chaos and destruction, dragons are generally seen as malicious creatures in Norse mythology. They're greedy, take more from their environment and the people around them than they give, and often reach a terrible end despite their size and power. There are three dragons that make their home in Yggdrasil: Nidhogg, Jörmungandr, and Fafnir.

First, there is Nidhogg (*Níðhögg* in Old Norse that translates to "evil blow"), a great wyrm, or long dragon with small wings, arms, and legs, that is also called the "dread corpse eater." They live in Helheim in the roots of Yggdrasil, and they chew on the roots of the tree and the corpses of the dead, trying to consume the dregs of life from both. They live in the mountains of Nidafjö. When Ragnarok is imminent, they will fly from the mountain. They are a symbol of chaos, death, and trouble.

Next is Jörmungandr, who is frequently called the Midgard Serpent. He is a son of Loki and the giantess, Angrboda. His siblings are Hel and Fenrir. When Odin discovers Jörmungandr and his siblings, he sees that they could be the end of Asgard and tries to contain them. Odin sends the Midgard Serpent into the oceans of Midgard. It's so large that it circles the flat disk of Midgard and rests in the deepest parts of the oceans. It is a snake that eats its tail, similar to the ouroboros in ancient Greece, and is well acknowledged in modern times to be one. While terms like "snake" and "serpent" are used to describe Jörmungandr, he is still considered a dragon and sometimes is depicted with small arms and legs. When Ragnarok comes, Jörmungandr will leave the oceans and flood Midgard before he and Thor kill each other.

Fafnir is the final dragon and is unique because he was a dwarf who became a dragon. As a dwarf, he loved gold so much and was so greedy that he transformed into a dragon to protect his hoard. He is murdered by the folk hero Sigurd, who flatters Fafnir until he has an opportunity to murder

the dragon. Fafnir is another example in Norse mythology of how greed results in an individual's ultimate downfall.

THE ANCESTORS

The honored dead hold a special place in the Norse pantheon. Depending on the text you read and the time period the source texts are referencing, there are anywhere between three and six different places for the souls of the dead to go. Spirits of the dead may go to several different afterlives and were often called on in myths to answer questions. Of the several afterlives, many spirits could be found residing in:

Fólkvangr: A restful field for warriors, overseen by Freyja. Those who died honorably in battle could be chosen by Freyja to stay, with the remainder going to Odin in Valhalla.

Valhalla: The final resting place for those who died a warrior's death in battle where they would spend every day of their afterlife fighting other honored warriors and every night feasting on meat and mead. Odin oversees this realm.

Víðbláinn: A third peaceful afterlife that may only be accessible for souls of the dead after the twilight of the gods, Ragnarok.

Hel/Helheim: A place under the roots of Yggdrasil where those who died of natural causes, illness, and starvation would rest. By implication, this may have been the afterlife the poor were expected to go to.

SIGRDRIFUMAL VICTORY TOKEN

A common incantation used by modern practitioners of Norse magic today comes from a section of *The Poetic Edda* called Sigrdrifumal, or "Victory-Bringer," which recounts the exploits of the hero Sigurd, who sets out to find the Valkyrie Brynhildr after slaying a dragon. Modern-day dragons might look like a particularly difficult project or a person or obstacle that stands in your way. Slaying these dragons requires the same grit, gumption, and luck—and this token will help.

Gather a red candle, a piece of paper cut into a square, and a pen. Light the red candle for bravery and bold moves. Write the following stanzas as many times as you need to fill the piece of paper:

Hail the Day,
Hail the sons of Day!
Hail the Night, and her daughters!
Look on us with kindly eyes,
and grant us victory.
Hail the gods,
Hail the goddesses,
and the abundant Earth!
Grant us wisdom and wise speech,
and healing hands for life.

Fold the corners of the paper into the center, making their tips touch and creating another square. Repeat this process three times, until you have a sturdy square. Drip the wax on the paper to seal it, then allow the candle to snuff out naturally on a heat-safe surface.

Rán's Net: A giantess and wife of Ægir (god of the sea) has a large net that she uses to scoop up the souls of sailors who are lost at sea. Some still

end up in Helheim.

Skadi's Mountains: Those who died in the wilderness, such as from animal attack or exposure, could be claimed by Skadi (the goddess of the untamed wilds) in the afterlife.

Much like the argument that Snorri Sturluson makes in *The Prose Edda*, ancestors are often venerated in positions of spiritual power after their deaths. In the Eddas, some honored ancestors, especially those of royalty or otherwise influential to humanity, can become Alfar (elves, see **here**) or Landvættir (land spirits, **here**).

The ancient Norse believed that the dead continued with us after they passed away in some way or another. Often, they beseeched their dead to help with crops or answer pressing questions with their many years of wisdom. In modern practice, ancestors provide gifts and guidance if honored properly with mead, honey, milk, or bread.

OTHER BEINGS AND SPIRITS

Aside from the factions of the gods, there are several other mythical spirits and beings in Norse mysticism. Sometimes they're mentioned in the Eddas and sagas. Other times, they're spirits that the early Norse peoples would have believed existed and interacted with spiritually in subtle ways. As in ancient times, these spirits can be prayed to, meditated on, or given gifts to gain their favor and guidance.

DWARVES

Dwarves look very much like humans and are extremely creative and crafty. They live in Nidivilir amongst the roots of Yggdrasil. Responsible for the Aesir's most treasured possessions, most dwarves are blacksmiths, crafters, weapon makers, and occasionally thieves and magicians. They can be temperamental, and you most certainly do not want to get on their bad side. Dwarves are also more comfortable in the dark and will turn to stone if they're caught in the light of day.

Some origin myths for the dwarves closely tied them to death with the first dwarves being born from the rotting body of Ymir. They have a close

relationship with the dead because of this origin story and their proximity to Helheim. Some scholars think that the dangerous or overly ambitious spirits of dead ancestors can sometimes become dwarves in the afterlife. As a nod to the ancestral way, modern practitioners of Norse mysticism may gift dwarves offerings of mead, wine, or beer on their workbench or craft-making surface for tinkering inspiration.

TROLLS

Trolls are magical creatures that prefer to be left alone. The word "troll" literally translates to magic. The language used to describe trolls has changed over time, but there are a few beings that modern mystic practitioners could be referring to when using the term "troll." Some source materials suggest that a troll is merely the unfriendly and brusque Jotnar who lives in the wilderness practicing magic that prefers not to be bothered. This version evolved (rather unkindly) into the trolls we think of in folklore today: large and strong yet dimwitted creatures that prefer to live by themselves in the wild.

Other representations of trolls describe them more as mythical magicians of any divine faction or origin. Some of them were even human. People who practice Trolldom, otherwise known as Nordic folk magic, were known as the "trollcunning."

ALFAR

The stunning residents of Alfheim are the alfar, also called "light elves" and "dark elves." Alfar who are considered "light elves" are as bright and beautiful as the sun itself. "Dark elves" are just as beautiful, exist underground, and prefer not to go out in the light. Aside from their home in Alfheim, the alfar will also make their home in sacred natural places in Midgard. The sacred spaces that one might find the alfar occupying could be near magical bodies of water, untouched forest wilderness, fairy circles made of mushrooms in the grass, or other spaces of natural beauty.

They are compulsively clean but love the beauty of the untouched wilderness. They're said to be experts at magic, and aligning oneself with a holy alfar spirit can provide a strong magical ally. Honorable ancestors may join their ranks and they are often considered to be guardian spirits. Norse tribes honored their male ancestors who became alfar in the afterlife on Alfablot, the fall harvest celebration, usually on the autumnal equinox.

DISIR

The term disir (*dísir* in Old Norse) is a category of spirits that encompasses many types of feminine spirits—and in some cases, goddesses as well—that attach themselves to a specific person or group of people, such as fallen warriors or mothers. Disir take an active interest in the individual that they follow. Like many of the entities that make up Norse mysticism, disir may be benevolent or malicious. A good disir would manifest as luck in the human they follow. A bad disir could manifest as increased anxiety or depression. They can provide guidance and help or misfortune, depending on the disir.

An excellent example of disir are the Norns, who would pick a single person and play with their fate across their lifetime, and the Valkyries, a group of warrior goddesses that would reap the souls of warriors that died in battle. The creation and classification of disir are a bit unclear based on the wide group of entities that they encompass. The goddess Freyja is as much of a disir as an honored ancestor who became a disir upon their death.

Honored ancestors who become disir in death could continue to be a maternal guardian spirit for an individual or a family. Some Norse families revered their disir with gifts and offerings, particularly if they claimed

hereditary descent from a female hero or supernatural spirit. Norse tribes honored their disir on Disablot, an annual festival held sometime between the winter solstice and spring equinox.

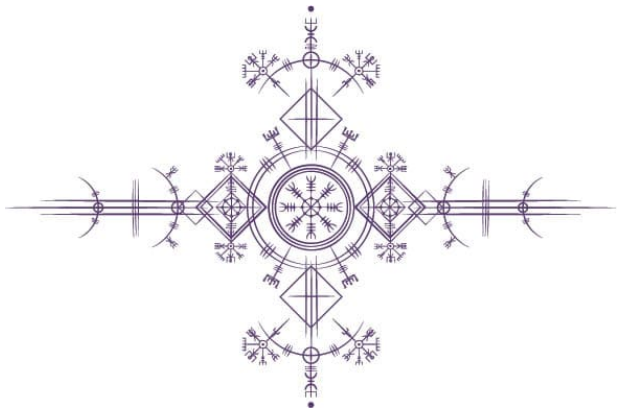
NORNS

As a type of smaller disir, a norn is a fate-weaving female spirit that's tied to an individual, family, or group. They may be born into the world, or honorable female ancestors may join their ranks as a spirit. Some people believe that each human has their own personal norn that helps them guide their fate. These norns come from different lineages: Jotnar norns, dwarfish norns, elvish norns, and the like. The lineages of these norns are thought to dictate the way an individual interacts with their fate. Dwarfish norns bring misfortune, as they are called "daughters of hibernation." These norns are attracted to humans who let life happen *to* them rather than unfold for them as active participants. Elfin norns often guide souls from the land of the living to the immortal halls of the ancestors. Likewise, Valkyries are also a type of norn that attach themselves to warriors bound for glorious fates.

In traditions where the norns are more prevalent, they're said to at least be present with humans twice in their lives: the day they're born and the day they die. "Norn porridge" is still sometimes left in the birthing room as a gift for the norns in the hopes of them bestowing luck and prosperity in the child's life. This is reflected in the original old German folktale of "Sleeping Beauty," where gifts are given by some norns but not all. The tale has its roots in an early Icelandic saga called "The Tale of Norna-Gest" from 1300 CE, where a spurned norn curses the child with immortality in response to a slight at a party. Common spirit norns are a bit different than the deified Norn trio of fate goddesses.

FYLGJA

A fylgja is an animal spirit that helps guide an individual's fortune and helps each person discover the best way for them to shape their future. Lucky fylgja spirits will sometimes follow a family for generations, from parents to their children, to help a family remain strong and fortunate. If a fylgja isn't passed down, they will often take the form of the first animal that the midwife sees after the birth of the baby or an animal that the child develops an extremely strong bond with. Your fylgja is a constant companion and they'll often inhabit your dreams to give you guidance on how best to shape your fate.



LANDVÆTTIR

Landvættir (which translates to "land spirits") is that feeling when you walk into a natural glen in the woods and feel at peace or in awe. They primarily reside in wild places and often they will attach themselves to a specific tree or fixture in the environment. They protect the natural world from humans, so when nature bites back due to humanity's avarice, it is almost certain that a landvættir had a hand in that retribution.

The belief in land spirits was important to Norse society because it encouraged individuals to treat their natural environment as something more than a raw resource. This can apply to modern Norse pagan practices as well. By thinking of a natural resource or wild space as having a spirit, we make the land a person in our hearts and minds.

Certain areas of Iceland still strongly believe in landvættir. So much so that established areas of an Icelander's personal property will remain untended and wild for the spirits, and children are cautioned against

entering the landvættir's domain. If the child does, they're expected to ask for permission first and treat the area with respect. Some landvættir were once our honored ancestors, especially if they cared for a specific environmental spot in life. The land welcomes those who treat it with reverence.

IMPORTANT SYMBOLISM

Along with the runes, there are many illustrations and symbols that strongly encapsulate the ideas and philosophies of Norse mythology and mysticism. This is by no means an exhaustive list of symbols. Some of them are visual only and accompany oral traditions, while others refer to symbols as they occur in the ancient Norse epics. Even a brief understanding of these will not only deepen your understanding of the Norse culture as a whole but can also enrich your own magical practice.

Yggdrasil: Yggdrasil, or the world tree, is what holds the nine realms together. Creatures skitter through its branches and feed off of its roots. It's a sacred tree that symbolizes the connection between life and death.

Mjolnir: One might think that Thor's hammer, Mjolnir, is a symbol of raw strength and power. However, this symbol attracts blessings and grants protection. Thor was the Aesir's key protector, and the same is true for this symbol.

Troll Cross: This Swedish symbol will ward off evil or malevolent spirits. It keeps them from getting mischievous around a person who has it hanging in their house or wears it as a charm. Usually seen as a bent piece of metal.

Ouroboros: Ouroboros are images where a snake eats its own tail. These symbols have their origin in ancient Greece. However, Jörmungandr, the Norse Midgard Serpent, certainly counts as an ouroboros. This symbol aligns with the ancient Norse reverence for cycles and their belief that every end is also a beginning.

Bee: Bees were one of the animals closely associated with the Valkyries and Norns in Norse myth. Bees and Valkyries were both called *sigewif* in Anglo-Saxon (which literally translates to "a swarm of bees"), and Snorri wrote that bees make their honey from the waters of Urdr's Well. Bees therefore appeared in Norse art and grave goods as a symbol of the Valkyries.

Sun Cross: Also known as the solar wheel, the sun cross is a prehistoric symbol that aligns with ancient sun worship. The Nordic bronze age artifact of the Trundholm sun chariot shows Sól's chariot bringing the sun across the sky and has sun crosses as wheels (see **here** for more on Sól).

Heart of Hrunger: Sometimes misappropriated as the valknut, the heart of Hrunger is what we call the symbol with three interlocking triangles (although the term itself is fairly new) that shows up on ancient Norse ships and at temples. Hrunger was one of the many giants that Thor slayed and was said to have a three-pointed heart. This symbol represents the number nine due to the nine triangle points it shows. When misattributed as a valknut, it often symbolizes devotion to Odin.

Number 9: The number nine pops up a lot in Norse mysticism and is considered sacred or holy. Nine realms. Nine dwellings of the gods in Asgard. Nine steps for Thor before he falls at Ragnarok. Feasts that last nine days, you get the picture. The specific powers of the number nine are vast and mysterious.

Ægishjálmrm: Commonly known as the Helm of Awe, this symbol was drawn on the brow (usually with a bodily fluid like saliva) to help inspire courage and offer protection. Its placement between the eyebrows served as a reminder and a focal point for internal power, particularly for women.

Vegvísir: Also known as a Viking's Compass or a Norse Compass, this symbol is meant to help guide the way of the people who use it. It's meant to keep people on their path and prevent them from losing their way, whatever way that may be.

CHAPTER 5

NORSE DEITIES AND MYTHOLOGY

The inherent purpose of all mythology is to inspire awe and wonder that can lead to introspection. They are riddles, meant to teach us how to think for ourselves. Norse mythology does that, in some regards, but the stories and characters presented can sometimes truly live with wild and reckless abandon. The behavior of the gods and goddesses isn't often moralistic in nature, but rather their actions were crafted to help the readers understand how to lead a full life. The divine and their mythology also model how flaws and struggles can help us understand the human experience. Myths show the audience examples of patterns of behaviors and dynamics between personalities. Through this, they teach us acceptance, how to learn from painful follies, and different ways to reach for growth and success. gods and goddesses of Norse mythology don't exist to be paragons of morality, but rather to teach and inform the people who worship them through their wins and losses. These divine models show how our flaws and struggles can help us develop into our full potential. The gods also help play out different patterns of behaviors and dynamics between personalities, so that the people who worship them can make educated guesses on how situations in their real life will unfold. Through this, they teach us acceptance, how to learn from painful follies, and different ways to strive for growth and success.

THE GODS

When referring to gods in Norse mythology, we're speaking of the three factions mentioned earlier: the Aesir, Vanir, and Jotnar. The main gods that everyone thinks of in Norse mythology are primarily the Aesir, since they were constantly engaged in a battle of some sort and causing mischief. Additionally, the three most commonly known gods, Odin, Thor, and Loki, are all considered to be Aesir.

The Norse gods we'll cover in this section are Odin, Thor, Loki, Týr, Freyr, Manni, and Heimdallr. Other gods and divine figures are mentioned in this book, but these are the most prominent characters in Norse mythology. Additionally, while Odin, Thor, and Loki were all widely well known, there are only historical records of temples built for Odin, Thor, Freyr, and Týr.

ODIN

Óðinn (in Old Norse), *Wodan* (in Old Saxon), *Wuotan* (Old High German), and *Woden* (Old English)

Odin is the All-Father (*Alfödr* in Old Norse) and is considered to be the head of the Norse pantheon. He's the one who is many, the Lord of the Aesir, Father of Man, the Hanged God, and many other names (about 150, in fact). In Proto-Germanic, a language that emerged before the early Norse languages, he was also called "Leader of the Possessed," which creates a curious early form for the prolific Lord of the Gods.

Often depicted as being older, with white or gray hair and a graying beard, he is missing his left eye and wears either an eyepatch or a wide-brimmed hat that tips to cover his missing eye. He's older than the other gods despite Idunn's apples, which keeps the gods young (see more on **this page**) because advanced age is a reward for hard work and the sacrifices made in youth. He's one of the gods gifted with the power to shapeshift and does so frequently as he adopts new names.

Odin is also the god of poetry, war, death, wisdom, and ecstasy. Along with his role as leader of the Aesir in Asgard, he also rules over the halls of Valhalla. As part of his role as a death god, he is also a psychopomp, which

refers to any deity who shepherds the souls of the dead to their final resting place.

Wisdom and seeking out new knowledge are key motivators for Odin in his mythic adventures. So much so that he paid his own eye to drink from Mimir's Well of Wisdom and hung himself from Yggdrasil for nine days to learn the ways of magic and runes. He's immensely clever, although he's never considered to be as clever as his sworn blood brother, and notable prankster, Loki. Along with his blood brother, Odin has two other brothers, Vili and Ve, who do not show up too much in the surviving texts aside from their part in the creation myth. He is married to Frigga, the goddess of the home (see **here**).

At his hall and in Asgard, one would find many symbols of Odin. There is his throne, Hlidskhalf, where anyone who sits upon it can observe the entirety of the nine realms. There's his spear, Gungnir, that always strikes true. He has a gold ring, Draupnir (translated loosely from Old Norse as "the dripper"), that drips eight rings of its exact likeness every nine days. He's often seen with two talking ravens, Hugninn and Muninn (which mean "thought" and "memory," respectively), who are his messengers. Odin and his ravens symbolize the connection between your thoughts and memory when working the magic of seiðr in a trance.

Whenever he rides into battle, he does so on Sleipnir, an eight-legged steed that is both a gift from Loki and Loki's child. Two wolves, Geri (greedy one) and Freki (ravenous one) viciously follow him into battle even though they are likely the sons of the wolf Fenrir, who devours Odin whole at Ragnarok.

Although he didn't come from nothing (he has a father, and others came before him), Odin is called the All-Father because he is the father of all humanity due to the part he played in creating Ask and Embla. Additionally, his creation of Midgard and his parentage of the first of the Aesir (his son Thor) reaffirm this moniker. Odin is a wise patriarch and has a welcoming energy for those who work magic with him.

In modern Norse mystic practice, mead and meat are traditional offerings for many of the Aesir. Devoting yourself to Odin is a great way to connect to a calming but strong masculine energy. Call on Odin's wisdom when teasing out difficult puzzles and he will be entertained with you. While eagles and ravens have strong ties to the All-Father, purchasing their feathers in the United States is considered a felony. Rather than buying any feathers to leave him as gifts, collect feathers you find on your travels and leave them on your altar. His namesake can be seen in modern English as Wednesday, and rituals to honor or contact him are best performed on this day.

Before the importation of the Western astrology most of us are familiar with, Norse people had their own names for the stars, tied to the myths of the gods. For example, the Northern Crown, Corona Borealis, was called Aurvandil's Toe, after a myth where Thor cut off the giant's toe and threw it into the sky.

THOR

Þórr (Old Norse), *Thunær* (Old Saxon), *Donar* (Old High German), and *Þunor* (Old English)

The red god, protector of the Aesir, and friend of man, Thor is the son of Odin and another of the more well-known deities in the Norse pantheon. With a red, bushy beard and a voice that booms like thunder, it's not hard to imagine why.

Thor is the god of thunder, strength, lightning, strong winds, and torrential rains. He's the strongest of the gods, and probably the most foolish. Despite his bold and furious nature and immeasurable strength, he takes his role as protector of the gods very seriously and is also a symbol of safety, security, and protection.

Thor loves to eat and can often consume several fish and oxen whole, and there is no one that can outdrink him. He rarely goes on his adventures alone, and when he does go off on his own, it's usually to slay giants, trolls, or ogres. Frequent travel companions are Loki, to be the brains to his brawn, and Thjalfi, a human whose closeness to the thunder god signifies Thor's close relationship with humans.

He's the firstborn of the Aesir. His father is Odin, and his mother is a Jotunn named Jörð who is the literal embodiment of the earth. He lives in the kingdom of Thrúdvangar (which translates to "suddenly illuminated," roughly) in a hall called Bilskírnir in Asgard. He lives with his wife, Sif, and three children, Magni, Móði, and Thrud, which stand for "strength," "courage" or "angry one," and "force," respectively.

In modern-day practices, mead and meat are traditional offerings for many of the Aesir, and it's even more true for the god of thunder.

Channeling Thor through meditation or physical exercise and working with his essence through symbolic offerings can lend strength for protection to the practitioner. Performing any act of exercise or springing headfirst into a potentially foolish adventure will have the spirit of Thor walking beside you. His namesake can be seen in modern English as Thursday, and rituals to honor or contact him are best performed on this day.

LOKI

The Trickster God, Mischief Maker, The Bound God, Adversary of the Gods, The Sly God, Father of Monsters, Son of Laufrey; also called *Loptr* ("airy") and *Hveðrungr* ("roaring") in parts of *The Poetic Edda*

A trickster god, and both a bane and boon for the Aesir, Loki is as annoying as he is beautiful (extremely so, in both cases). Though he has Jotunn in his lineage, he is considered as one of the Aesir because he is the sworn blood brother of Odin. This means that they were raised together and swore an unbreakable vow that they would always have a seat at each other's tables and that they would never do harm to one another. Odin did this because he thought that having the agent of discord close at hand would keep Loki out of trouble and restrain him from making problems for the Aesir. It did neither, but Loki's troublemaking often resulted in the Aesir acquiring something valuable. Despite being called a "blood brother," Loki is a shapeshifter and happily takes the form of both male and female humans, gods, and animals. He uses this ability to both help and trick the other Aesir.

The rest of the Aesir assume that it's Loki's fault whenever something goes wrong, and they're usually right. The pranks that Loki carries out often appear to be committed purely for the sake of causing mischief, but they're frequently done to show that growth and new opportunities come from discomfort and bad circumstances. Mischievous, shameless, and challenging to get along with, Loki makes up for these flaws with his cleverness. He often is the reason that the Aesir have their finest items (the wall around Asgard, Thor's hammer Mjolnir, Odin's ring Draupnir, and many more). Frequently these items are acquired as a side effect of his trying to save his own neck. He does not care about what happens to him or the other Aesir as long as he survives.

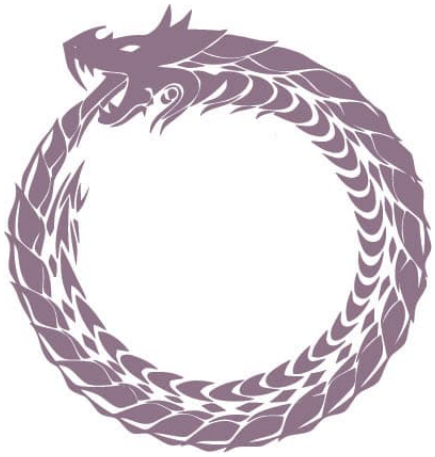
Loki lives in Asgard with his Aesir wife, Sigyn, and their two sons, Narfi and Vali. He also had a second Jotunn wife, Angrboda (which means “sorrow” or “regret”) who mothered three of the key harbingers of Ragnarok: Fenrir, the wolf that swallows Odin whole; Jörmungandr the Midgard Serpent that kills Thor; and Hel, the ruler of Helheim and goddess of death that leads an army of the undead to unseat the Aesir.

While he is a key figure in many of the poems of Eddas, there is very little archeological evidence of Loki. There were no cults to the father of monsters, no locations are named after him, and it is likely that despite his troublesome nature, the early Norse people didn’t think that he was going to steal their children or anything of the sort.

Loki’s actions are what pushes the narrative of the myths along. He symbolizes the power of a keen mind, radical acceptance, and the driving force behind change.

The bringer of change and rebirth through hardship, there are many ways to work with the god of mischief in modern mysticism practice. More so than the other gods, Loki experiences pain, and as such can be a powerful ally when you’re going through uncomfortable experiences. Give him offerings of sweet treats like cakes and fruit to help sweeten up sour experiences, or spicey foods to spice up your life in the name of chaos. Nets and knot magic are strong symbols for Loki, especially when the knots might signify clearing a path or blockage in your life. When you find yourself stagnant or stuck, bury a coin by a river to ask Loki to help you see

a way out of it. Tell Loki harsh truths and leave him red wine to drink to keep your secrets. Offerings of found items such as shedded snakeskin, cocoon husks, and feathers can symbolize reverence for his adaptability as a shapeshifter.



TÝR

Týr (Old Norse), Ziu (Old High German), *Tiw* (Old English) which stems from *Tiwaz* (Proto-Germanic, meaning "god")

Likely the oldest deity in the Norse pantheon, Týr is the Proto-Germanic sky god turned god of justice in Norse mythology. Týr is a warrior god with strong principles who presides over the law, democracy, and equity. As such, he's one of the most honest of the Aesir. In mythology, Týr symbolizes the importance of sticking to your principles and the nature of hard choices.

One of Týr's most prominent stories in the mythology is when he and Thor return from Jotunheim with the monstrous children of Loki. The entire trip back, he calmly speaks with, cares for, and raises Fenrir the wolf pup as a foster parent. As Fenrir grows to a monstrous size, all the other gods, including Odin and Thor, are either afraid of the wolf or see him as a threat. When the Aesir tries to trick Fenrir into agreeing to be restrained by playing on his pride, he doesn't trust their promise that they will release him if he can't break all his bonds. Fenrir will only agree to do so if one of the gods puts their hand in his mouth and Týr puts his sword hand in the wolf's maw as ransom. Because Fenrir trusts Týr, he agrees. When the rest of the Aesir

back out on their promise, Týr unblinkingly submits to losing his hand. Because of this, he is sometimes called the One-Handed God.

The constellations Big and Little Dippers were called Man's Chariot and Woman's Chariot respectively, though which deities they represented has been lost to time. Freyr and Freyja are likely possibilities.

Týr is beloved for his honesty, strength, and bravery. Although a god of war, he's not bloodthirsty, nor does he crave violence for the sake of violence. He was trusted to draft equitable and unbiased treaties for both sides of the conflict.

Týr's energy is sympathetic, mighty, and often represents hard choices, powerful lessons, consent, and the cost of sacrificing for one's principles. Wolves, swords, and scales are all symbols of Týr. Pray to Týr for legal advice and good counsel. The rune Tiwaz is a symbol tied to Týr and can be used in rituals to him. Mark your clothes with Tiwaz to carry Týr's legal protection on your person. Invoke his name twice before entering into situations where you think you deserve justice. His namesake can be seen in modern English as Tuesday, and rituals to honor or contact him are best performed on this day.

FREYR

Freyr (Old Norse, "lord"), also called *Ingunar-Frey* or *Fricco* in Sweden, *Frea* (Old English), *Fro* (Old High German)

Freyr is a fertility god that brings prosperity and abundance to crops. He commands rain and sunshine to promote plant life in all seasons. While he lives in Asgard and rules over Alfheim, he is actually a Vanir and was traded to the Aesir as part of the truce after **the Aesir-Vanir War**. He is an excellent fighter and nurturer and a symbol of male fertility and desire.

Freyr is the twin brother of Freyja (see **here** for more on her). He has a boat named Skidbladnir—that he can fold up into his pocket—which can house all the Aesir and always has favorable winds when deployed. A

golden boar named Gullinbursti, who can run through air and water quickly, pulls his chariot. A prolific fighter (he once slew a giant with only an antler), Freyr shows up in the lore primarily as a lovesick god pining after his soon-to-be wife. He trades his magic sword that can fight by itself to his servant in exchange for brokering a marriage between him and a Jotunn named Gerðr (anglicized to *Gerd*). Without his sword, he's cut down at Ragnarok in his fight with Surtr, the leader of the forces from Muspelheim, but the new growth that happens after the world is scorched by his vanquisher is attributed to the fertility powers of Freyr.

Empathetic and full of love, Freyr's energy is that of tender romantic love, and easy-going, non-toxic masculinity. As a modern practitioner, leave offerings of fresh plant life or antlers at your altar to garner his favor, which is certainly not difficult to gain. He's a fan of new projects and following your heart's desire, so hold him in your heart when following your dreams.

The Bifrost is often described as a rainbow bridge, but some translations describe it more as a glittering road filled with colors. Considering this and the fact that Heimdallr's home is described as a seat in the sky, some interpretations believe that the Bifrost is actually the Milky Way, which is easy to see close to the Arctic Circle for about half the year. In some cultures, the Milky Way is also considered to be the road of the dead.

HEIMDALLR

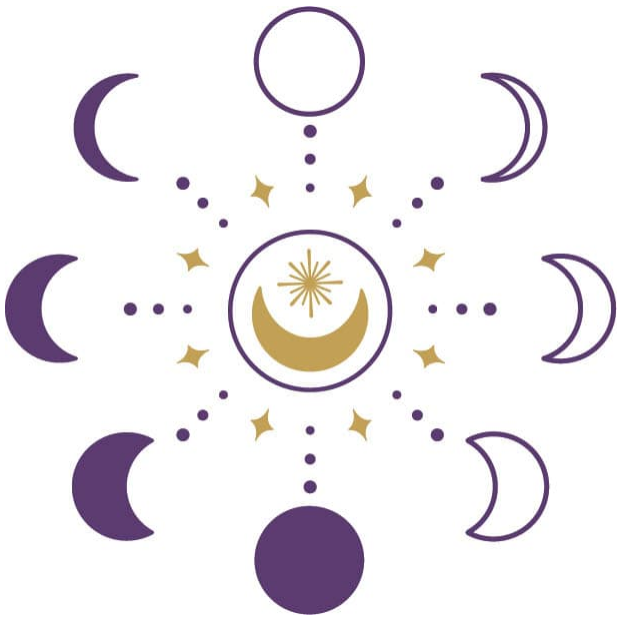
Heimdallr (Old Norse), also called *Gullintanni* ("gold teeth"), *Vindlér* ("sea winds"), and *Heimdall* (anglicized)

If Thor is the protector of the gods, Heimdallr is the guardian of them, meaning that Heimdallr is responsible for keeping as many threats out as possible with Thor as the last line of defense. Sometimes called the White God for reasons that are not clear, Heimdallr is described as having gold teeth and is known for always having his sword on hand. His symbol is the ram because part of his name in Old Norse translates to "ram."

He's the guardian of the Bifrost, the glittering rainbow bridge between worlds, and is seen as a boundary figure in Norse mythology. There's another myth where he's called Rig and it explains the importance of social order and the caste system. Other gods go to him for advice due to his wisdom, as he has exceptional powers of perception. The surviving texts also suggest that Heimdallr might have given one of his ears to Mimir's Well as a payment to hear as well as he does. He rarely needs sleep, can see perfectly in the dark, and can hear the grass growing in the ground or the wool growing out of sheep.

Heimdallr is born to nine maiden mothers, potentially the nine waves who are the daughters of Ran (see **here** for more). He lives in Himinbjörg (which translates roughly to "heaven mountain" in Old Norse). He has a horn called Gjallarhorn ("screaming horn" in Old Norse) that can be heard in all of the nine realms when it's blown. It will only be blown once at Ragnarok, where he will ride his golden-maned horse, named Gullfaxi, into battle.

Heimdallr understands the importance of boundaries and is the most perceptive of the gods. If you need to find something that's been lost, discover a hidden truth, or see a situation objectively and clearly, leave offerings of wool, potentially in the form of a bow made of yarn, to Heimdallr tucked into barriers such as stone walls or fences. Heimdallr is also a great deity to bond with when learning how to establish proper boundaries. If you're a reformed people-pleaser looking for assistance in advocating for space you need for yourself, chant Heimdallr's name for strength while burning a candle for him during the waxing moon.



MÁNI

The Waxer, The Waner, The Year-Counter, The Gleaming One, Child of Night

Máni and his sister **Sól** are ancient deities for the moon and sun. It's unclear based on the surviving materials if Máni was worshiped before the Norse gods or if he was added to the pantheon later, but he's mentioned by name in *The Poetic Edda*. It's said the gods put him in the sky to count the days of man as they pass. This is because he controls the waxing and waning of the moon, which was an important way for the ancient Norse peoples to keep track of time as it passed. Because moon cycles were also important in

determining the dates of certain heathen festivals, he's also heavily associated with witchcraft and seiðr.

Hati the wolf chases Máni through the sky every day, although he doesn't seem as perturbed by it as his sister. The wolf will catch him at Ragnarok and the moon will go dark in the sky.

Invoking Máni's name during moon magic spells will increase their power. As the keeper of time, performing spells over several days will please him. If you ever feel like you don't have enough time during the day, leave shiny or glittering offerings for him (especially silver coins) on your altar. His namesake can be seen in modern English as Monday, and rituals to honor or contact him are best performed on this day.

Many of the Norse divinities were named in a way that directly translated to their domain. For example, the goddess Sjöfn turned the idle thoughts of men and women into thoughts of love and affection. The Old Norse word *sjafni* loosely translates to "love, longing, and affection." Some skalds may have used the gods and goddesses with names like these as an idea personified.

GODDESSES

"Aesir" nowadays is used to describe the entire faction of gods and goddesses in Norse mythology. However, it used to be gendered so that Aesir meant the male gods of Asgard, while Asynuir were the female goddesses. Today, we use Asynuir to refer to high goddesses or those who were in Frigg's inner circle.

The Norse goddesses we'll cover in this section are Frigg, Freyja, Skadi, Hel, Idunn, Ran, Sól, and the Norns (Urdr, Verdhandi, and Skuld). There are many more important goddesses that were revered for a variety of reasons, but these are a good place to start. Some of these deities had their own temples and others were simply characters in myths and folklore rather than properly worshiped deities.

FREYJA

Freyja (Old Norse, "Lady"), *Freya* (anglicized), *Frūa* (Old Saxon), *Frouwa* (Old High German), *Frija* (Proto-Germanic)

Goddess of passion, love, battle, death, fertility, and magic, Freyja is one of the most accessible deities in the Norse pantheon. Freyja (like her twin brother **Freyr**) literally translates to "Lady." Her name, role, and popularity has raised debates on whether she and Frigga (Odin's wife and queen of the gods) started out as the same goddess in the Germanic pantheon. However, several of the surviving Norse texts mention them as distinctly different characters and there are subtle differences in their responsibilities that differentiate the two.

A mysterious free spirit and stunningly beautiful, Freyja is a goddess of many mysteries and was worshiped in ancient Norse cults. She's potentially the sorceress known as Gullveig who was involved in the Aesir-Vanir War in the poem "Voluspa" (see **here** for more on those exploits). She's referred to as Gefn in "Gylfaginning," which means "to give" and Syr, which means "sow." She is of the Vanir (not the Aesir) and a common invocation for her is "vanadis," which loosely translates to "queen of the Vanir."

Freyja has strong ties to the spriritual magic of seiðr (see **here**) and teaches what she knows to Odin. She's the queen of the Valkyries and is

also a psychopomp who guides the souls she chooses from the fallen warriors and brings them to Fólkvangr, a sub-area of Valhalla that she rules over. She gets first pick of half of the worthy warrior souls, so it's likely that her warriors are sharper and more precise than Odin's.

Unlike the fertility of Frigga (which focuses on motherhood and family) Freyja's fertility is tied to the cycle of life and death—that new life can only come from old and fertile fields.

FREYJA'S BEAUTY BATH

When you're suffering from stress, sadness, or low self-esteem, this cleansing bath drawing on Freyja's confidence and strong boundaries can do wonders.

First, gather some herbs for your bath. You can use whatever plants you feel are sacred or special to you, as long as they're not skin irritants. Here are some easily available and skin-safe recommendations:

Rose petals for self-love
Rosemary for purification
Parsley or chervil for protection
Juniper berries for clearing the mind
Thyme for boundaries
Grapefruit peel for joy

Once you have your herbs gathered, put them into a small pot of water on your stovetop and bring it to a boil. Let it simmer for about five minutes to infuse the herbs into the water before taking it off the heat to cool. Run a bath for yourself, as it fills, add a handful of salt to the water and stir, then strain the herbal infusion into the bath. Recite the following:

Water, which flows from the sacred wells. Salt, which comes from the body of the earth. Plants, which grow from the bark of Yggdrasil. Freyja, who shines like the light of the sun, hear my call. May my aching heart find love, joy, and bravery again. Wash away my sorrows and fears, just as the sea washes the stones.

Take your time soaking and relaxing in the bath, visualizing your cares dissolving and your energy returning. When you're done, thank the spirits and dispose of any leftover plant matter in the compost or trash. Leave Freyja an offering of an apple or a glass of wine as a token of gratitude. Dispose of the wine in your garden, at the crossroads, or however you would dispose of wine normally.

A lover of fine things, Freyja loves gold and cries tears of amber. A key symbol of hers is the fine golden necklace called Brísingamen, set with gems that shine like the sun. She has a boar called Hildisvíni (which translates to "battle pig") and four large cats that pull her chariot. Cats, boars, and birds of prey are key symbols for her. Óðr is her husband (which does not do much to differentiate her from Frigga, as the name is quite similar to Odin), and they have two daughters named Hnoss and Gersemi, which both translate to "treasure."

She's one of the most beautiful goddesses, as is evident by the many myths where people demand Freyja's hand in marriage as payment— which she refuses every time. Most of these myths involve Loki as a key figure and instigator, and as such, Freyja adamantly hates the trickster god. Freyja encourages us to follow our hearts and passions and to know that there is beauty in that.

Freyja is indulgent independence personified and a great goddess to work with when developing a self-care practice or increasing self-esteem. Appropriate offerings include apples or other fresh fruit, rye bread, honey, mead, and chocolate. As a Vanir, Freyja is fond of lovely natural places, and if you invoke her outdoors, you can also build a temporary altar called a *hörgr* for her by stacking up some rocks, similar to a cairn. Small figures or images of cats, horses, and boars are a nice touch for an altar as well.

FRIGGA

Frigg (sometimes how it's anglicized), *Fri* (in Old Saxon), *Frîja* (Old High German), and *Fridge* (Old English)

An ancient Indo-European sky queen, Frigga sits on the throne of the Aesir with her husband, Odin, as the highest of the Asynuir, or high goddesses. An earth goddess in the Norse pantheon, Frigga specifically ruled over well-tilled earth. Her name can be interpreted to mean love, pleasure, beloved, lover, or wife. She is often depicted wearing white, dark blue, or grey, with a golden girdle of keys since she is the master of the house. Frigga's role in mythology is symbolic of the role of wives in ancient Norse society. While their husbands were out voyaging, the running of the house was left to the women. They were peacekeepers who spoke diplomatically to guests in their household. That, and their role as weavers of their home gave them the name *Fridowebban*, which translates to "peaceweavers."

It's well known that she was gifted in prophecy, however, she is quite secretive and didn't tell people about her visions often. She's the keeper of keys, secrets, taxes, treasures, and records. Frigga is renowned for her weaving of not only textiles but also for spinning the clouds in the sky. She is connected to the magic of seiðr, and there are ancient twelfth-century

images of her riding a distaff (a loom devised used for spinning fibers, as well as seiðr magic) as if it were a witch's broom.

She lives in Fensalir in Asgard—also known as Hall of Mists, Sea Halls, or Marsh Halls—which connects her to the earth, sky, and waters of the world. She's the mother of Baldur the Beautiful and Hod the Blind. While she is the wife of Odin, much like the Hanged God, Frigga likely has relations outside of her husband (including his brothers Vili and Ve, if Loki is to be believed). Kind, comforting, and with a warm heart, Frigga with her quiet magic and powerful autonomy make her a powerful divine ally.

The constellation Orion's Belt was known by several different names; some saw it as a Fisherman's boat, while others called it Frigg's Distaff, after her magic staff.

Humble and down to earth, Frigga will guide you to find grounding energy. Her care for the home and hearth makes her an excellent house spirit, and you can leave offerings for her in the kitchen while you cook. Linden trees are sacred to her, so meditate at their roots to channel her wisdom. You can invoke her name to help guide any magical scrying, whether it be with a pendulum, water scrying, runes, or any other form. Leave her offerings of linseed oil, apples, barley, oats, dumplings, or pancakes to show her your appreciation. Her namesake can be seen in modern English as Friday, and rituals to honor or contact her are best performed on this day.

SKADI

Skaði (Old Norse), and sometimes anglicized as *Skade* or *Skathi*

The daughter of a Jotunn named Thiazi, Skadi enters the Norse pantheon after her father kidnaps **Idunn** and is murdered when Loki rescues the goddess. Skadi demands that the Aesir pay her weregild (compensation for murdering a key member of her household). The gods agree to compensate her with a husband from the Aesir, and by making her laugh through her grief after they see her scowling as she bashfully admires Baldur. They

make a game out of the weregild where they allow her to pick a husband from amongst the Aesir by only looking at their feet. She ends up marrying Freyja and Freyr's father, Njörðr. She's considered a member of the Aesir after the gods pay her weregild in this manner.

Skadi is the Norse goddess of the wilderness, hunting, skiing, wolves, and winter. Her more metaphysical domains are independence, wisdom, vengeance, justice, and conflict resolution. She is frequently depicted on skis or snowshoes and feels most at home in the mountains and on snow.

Although she happily married Njörðr, she finds that she's not happy living in his hall by the sea, and the two divorce amicably when it's clear their marriage doesn't work. It was thought that those who died out in the wilderness might be claimed by Skaði in the afterlife.

Skadi likes all wild things. Leave her offerings off the beaten path of tufts of fur and feathers you find. Scream her name from mountain tops when you're feeling distraught. Gather snow from the first snowfall and leave it on an altar as an offering for her. A gift of wild berries, or berries purchased from the farmer's market, is also well-received. If you have anger in your heart but desire to part on amicable terms with the person who's wronged you, invoke Skadi when performing a cord-cutting ritual. Write your name and that of the person who you no longer wish to be associated with on two black candles. Tie a string at the same height on each candle on a heat-safe surface and light them both at the same time. The cord is cut when the flame burns down. Let the two candles burn down to their base (but never leave lit candles unattended).

HEL

Hel (Old Norse), *Hela* (anglicized), *Helan* (Old Saxon and Old English), *Haljō* (Proto-Germanic, "hidden place")

Often depicted as a young girl, one half of Hel is dead and decomposing while the other half looks mostly alive, if not a little pale or blue. The only daughter of Angrboda and Loki, Hel is retrieved from Jotunheim at Odin's request when he hears a prophecy saying that Loki's children will bring about the ruin of Asgard. He makes Hel the ruler of Helheim and considers Asgard safe with her confined to the realm that bears her name.

In Helheim, she eats from a plate called Hunger with a knife called Famine. The entryway of her hall is called Stumbling. Sickbed is the name of her bed and Misfortune curtains her windows. While this dismal description paints Hel and Helheim as being an unlikely object of veneration, consider that while dying, being bloodied in battle was thought to lead to the most honorable afterlife, although many common folk still died of less "noble" causes and went to Helheim.

Some people find her to be an empathetic goddess despite her role in Ragnarok because many of the dead came to her domain, but she was given very little to support them in the afterlife. Along with the dead, Hel is an unseen champion of the underdog.

One might wonder who would want to pay tribute to such a frightening goddess, but as the liege of those who died by old age or illness, she likely holds the spirits of any deceased friends and family. Any time spent in a graveyard is a time spent with the ruler of the underworld. Offerings of dried and bleached bones or dead bugs would please her. Leave a cup of red wine out for her on your dinner table to garner her favor. Dispose of the wine in your garden, at a crossroads, or however you would dispose of wine normally.

IDUNN

Iðunn (Old Norse), and sometimes anglicized as *Idunn, Idunna*, *Ithunn*, or *Ydun*

Idunn is the goddess of youth, luck, and fertility. Keeper of the golden apples that bestow youth on the other Aesir, she channels her power into the fruit to keep the Aesir in fighting shape. Her apples are reminiscent of Hera's golden orchard in Greek mythology and the creation myth of Christianity with Adam and Eve.

Idunn only appears in two poems: the poem where Loki kidnaps her for Thjiazi (a Jotunn who threatens him, and Skadi's father), and in "Lokasenna" where Loki berates her husband. She's married to the god Braggi, who is the god of poetry and song. When her husband is verbally attacked by Loki, she is the only one of the gods in Asgard who tries to resolve the situation diplomatically. She is kind, demure, and gentle.

No apple compares to Idunn's, but she would appreciate apple offerings, nevertheless. As the goddess of youth and rejuvenation, seeds and young seedlings are also ample offerings for her due to their capacity for growth. Call her to your side when you need the kindness or the strength of your youth.

RAN

Rán (Old Norse, "robber"), *Ran* (anglicized)

Ran is the goddess of the sea and is listed among the Asynjur, which are the high goddesses of Asgard, even though she's not usually among them in the

Eddas. Ran is usually mentioned through kennings rather than as an active participant in skaldic poetry. Much like the depths of the sea, we know very little of her.

She is the wife of Ægir, also a sea god. While Ægir is often portrayed as the calm and benevolent seas with favorable winds for sailors, Ran is the colder, crueler, and downright meaner side of the sea. Some sources depict Ran as a safe harbor for sailors lost at sea and others depict her more like a siren that catches overboard sailors in her net and drowns them. Ran and Ægir have nine daughters who are nine waves (and also potentially Heimdallr's mothers).

Seashells, saltwater, and fishbones are all pleasing offerings for Ran. There's saltwater in tears, so whenever you feel an emotional tide shift within you, invoke her name to help you weather through it. Give her gifts to garner her favor for long travels, especially if those travels are over large bodies of water.

SÓL

Sól (in Old Norse), *Sunna* (Old High German), and sometimes anglicized as *Sol*

Often referred to as the Shining Gods, Sól and her brother, Máni, are ancient deities for the sun and moon. A statue of a beautiful woman riding a chariot with solar crosses for the wheels dragging the sun survives as a relic from the Nordic Bronze Age. It shows that solar worship was important to the early Norse peoples. This early sun goddess is the precursor to Sól. She's mentioned as an Asynjur but is rarely depicted amongst them.

Rudolf Simek, an Austrian religious scholar, made the connection that the Hyades star cluster might have looked like a wolf's mouth eating the sun as it passes through it every year. They called it Ulf's Keptr, which means "mouth of the wolf." The sun's successful passing through the stars shaped like a "V" every year symbolized Ragnarok being staved off for another year.

Sól wasn't always the goddess of the sun. Rather, her father tried to marry her to someone named Glen, and the Aesir were affronted by this, for some reason. To punish both her and her father, the Aesir sent Sól up in the sky to guide the path of the sun. There are also vivid descriptions of her being chased across the sky by the wolf Sköll, which translates to "treachery" or "mockery." There are several myths where stealing the sun for her beauty is mentioned, and in some translations of ancient texts, she's present when the wall around Asgard is built. Ragnarok will commence once the wolf catches up to her and consumes her.

Sunflowers, honey, candle wax, and anything that glows or shines would be welcomed offerings by Sól. Her namesake can be seen in modern English as Sunday, and rituals to honor or contact her are best performed on this day or at high noon when she rests at her apex in the sky.

MERSEBURG CHARM

The Merseburg Charms, or incantations, are old chants that date back to before the Eddas were written. Their source material is written in Old High German and discovered by the Brothers Grimm, which is much more aligned with strictly German folklore. However, the original charm uses the Old High German version of several key gods and goddesses in Norse mythology, making it a part of the same magical tradition. When you're in any type of pain, rewrite this poem into something that suits your needs. Chant it nine times when you feel eclipsed by suffering.

The second Merseburg Charm looks like this:

Like bone-sprain, so bone-sprain
Like joint-sprain, so joint-sprain
Bone to bone
Blood to blood
Joints to Joints
So may they be glued

The original charm was used for setting sprains or broken bones, but you can revise this into a chant to heal the things that ail you. For example, if you're suffering heartache, chant the following for a modified Merseburg Charm:

Like broken heart, so broken heart
Like lost touch, so lost touch
Heart to heart
Love to love
Breakup to breakup
So may the pieces be glued.

THE NORNS

The Norns are a group of goddesses comprised of three female Jotnar (or they are a group of Aesir-like beings that were raised by Jotnar). These three immensely powerful goddesses take care of the root of Yggdrasil, the world tree, that rests in Asgard, the home of the Aesir. Their origins can change a bit from story to story. Some myths have them existing in the primordial soup before Ymir and his sacred cow. Other myths suggest that the three are sisters that came from the sea. They're said to have had a hand in writing the cosmic laws and that they wrote the first runes before even All-Father Odin. They reside at the Well of Origins (or Urdr's Well) where the root of Yggdrasil feeds the tree. Every day they wash the roots with water from the well and repair it with mud and clay, an ancient agricultural practice that protected plants from pests. Urdr and Verdhandi also carve runes into the tree as a way of caring for it.

Urdr is believed to be the original Norn in Norse mythology, and it's thought that Verhandi and Skuld were added later under the influence of the Greek pantheon. Urdr, Verhandi, and Skuld are like the three Greek Fates—three sisters in Greek mythology who represented the past, present, and

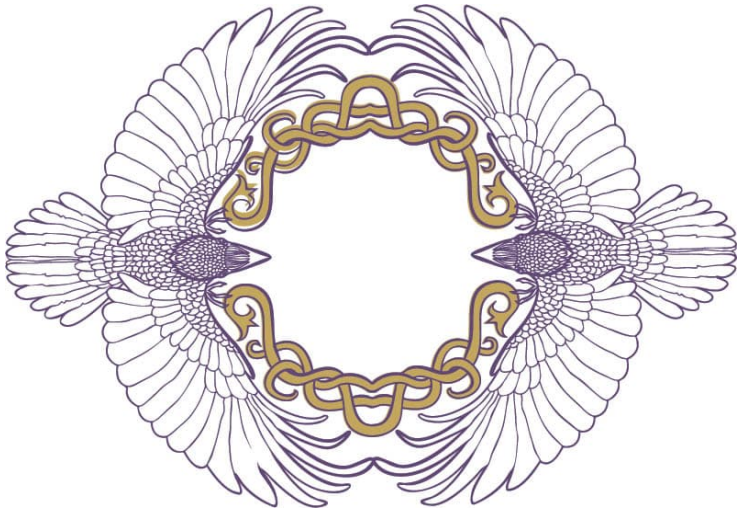
future—in both name and some of their key responsibilities. They weave and spin the fates of every living being: gods, dwarves, giants, and humans alike.

Like their Greek counterparts, the loom is also a symbol of the three Norns and their domains of past, present, and future. Each Norn is represented: Urdr by the fabric that has already been woven, Verhandi by the section of threads becoming fabric, and Skuld by the area of the loom that remains unspun. Other gods and goddesses often view the Norns as annoying since they'd prefer to be doing anything but what fate has in mind for them. The Aesir discuss all important matters at the Well of Urdr.

Some traditions recognize a type of spirit also called norns that plague humans with misfortune or bestow luck and good fortune. See **here** for the section on norn spirits in Spirit Cosmology.

URDR

Urdr, also called *Urðr, Urd*, or *Urth*, is the Norn of the past. Urdr loosely translates to "origins" in Old Norse. The most common translation of her name is "that which is," but other translations have asserted that it means "past," "fate," "origin," or "beginning." Some Anglo-Saxon texts refer to her as Wyrd, which meant "fate" or "destiny." As the knower of the history of all things, she weaves the Web of Wyrd, which dictates the patterns of the past and the way everything connects to one another. She is the master of the Well of Origins in Asgard, where she and all the other Norns live.



Some hypothesize that Urdr is the first-person narrator of the epic poem "Voluspa," which is the first poem in *The Poetic Edda* and the "beginning" of Norse mythology. This would mean she's a powerful entity that came before the beginning of the world. Regardless of whether she was the narrator in "Voluspa," she is certainly older and wiser than the other two Norns. Some myths show her having tea with Odin, which represents the importance of knowing the past.

VERDHANDI

Verdhandi, also sometimes called *Verthandi* or *Verdandi*, is the Norn of the present. Her name is usually translated into "that which is happening," but can also be translated into the variations "about to happen, "becoming," "being," or "happening now." She and Urdr carve marks on the roots of Yggdrasil as a symbol that the future is shaped by the past and the present. For anyone divining with runes, seeking to connect Verdhandi and connecting to the current moment will often result in more accurate readings.

SKULD

Skuld is the Norn of the future and the most mysterious of the three. While her name is most translated to mean “debt,” other translations include “blame,” “necessity,” and “what the future owes,” although these are used to a lesser extent. While Skuld is the Norn of the future and seeks to guide us toward proper action, it remains the individual’s responsibility to craft their own present and future. Skuld being a mystery is intentional since the future is also a mystery.

NORSE MYTHOLOGY

A myth is a story with deific entities performing incredible acts meant to teach something profound to the people consuming them. Legends are very much the same, but they often involve real people and tend to be more realistic than fantastical. They also frequently involve folk heroes that are loosely based on a real person with some magical elements incorporated in. As mentioned earlier, *The Poetic Edda* is split into mythological poems and heroic poems. The mythological poems help us get to know the gods, as well as teach us about ancient Norse life and values. What follows is a smattering of the most important Norse myths that will help you build a basic understanding of Norse mythology.

THE NORSE CREATION MYTH

According to Norse mythology, there were once two realms of fire and ice and very little else. The Ginnungagapp, the space between worlds also known as the "Yawning Void," spanned the space between Niflheim (a cold world of mist and ice) and Muspelheim (a world of relentless fire and heat). Through the Yawning Void, a warm breeze from Muspellsheim melted ice from Niflheim. Ice started to melt from the heat and from the water came the first of the frost Jotunn, Ymir, and the cow Audhumla (also seen as *Auðumla* or *Auðumbla* in Old Norse). Audhumla would lick the salty ice and her milk would feed Ymir. As Audhumla licked the rime from the frost for three days, Buri, grandfather to Odin and his brothers, fell free from the ice. As the warm air from Muspelheim continued, Ymir would sweat from his armpits and feet. From his sweat, the frost Jotnar and giants were born, including Odin's mother, Bestla, Buri's son, Burrm, and Bestla's three sons: Odin, Vili, and Ve.

Throughout this time, Ymir only allowed himself to feed from Audhumla's milk but there was nothing else for the three brothers to eat in the Yawning Void. The three brothers grew increasingly hungry. There was no space for them to grow and no way for them to thrive. Desperate and displeased with this reality, they plotted against and succeeded in killing Ymir for his greed. They viewed this as a necessity, as there was nothing else to survive on and Ymir had not allowed them Audhumla's milk.

When they killed him, Ymir's blood produced a flood that killed all but one of his frost-giant children. Once the flood settled, it became what we know as the ocean. Odin, Vili, and Ve continued to use Ymir's body to build the world in the Ginnungagap. His body became the ground beneath us, his bones formed the mountains, and his brain became the clouds. His skull protects Midgard as the sky and is held up by four dwarven guardians—Austri, Vestri, Norðri, and Suðri—at the cardinal directions of east, west, north, and south. Finally, his eyelashes were settled as a fence around Midgard (loosely translated as "middle enclosure") to keep out any demons from Muspelheim or angry frost giants from Niflheim.

Thus, the Ginnungagap was filled and a home for man was made. The moral of this story is to caution people in power against unnecessary and unrelenting greed. It's told in the Gylfaginning section (also known as "The Beguiling of Gylfi") of *The Prose Edda*.

ASK AND EMBLA

Once the tide of Ymir's blood had subsided and the walls were built upon Midgard, Odin, Vili, and Ve found themselves exploring the new world that they had created. They appreciated its beauty but were struck by how empty it was. To no avail, they searched for some sign of life that Ymir's body might have left behind.

A world isn't a world until someone lives in it, so they made someone. Two someones, in fact. As they wandered the expanses, they found two pieces of driftwood along the ocean's shores. An ash and elm log sat gently touching each other on the beach. Odin and his brothers took the two logs and stood them upright in the sand, just as people stand tall. Odin held the branches of the logs and breathed life into them.

Vili looked at the logs and thought that they wouldn't be able to appreciate the wonderful world they'd been given if they were simply alive and stuck on this beach. He bestowed their two driftwood people with

consciousness, intelligence, ambition, drive, and the ability to move independently.

Ve looked at the logs that were rapidly becoming people and added fine details. From the ash log (thought of by the Norse as a solid wood for a spear that will not crack when carved), came a masculine form. From the elm log (a lilting tree with hardwood meant to be the planks of a ship or beams of a home), came a feminine form. He gave them ears to hear with, eyes to see with, and lips to speak with.

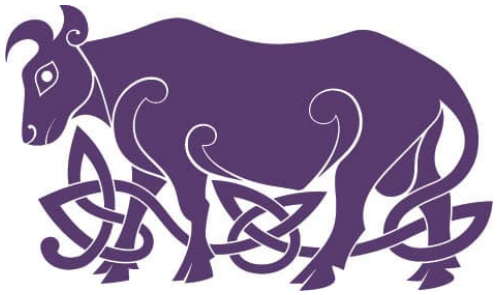
Odin, Vili, and Ves's final gifts to these new humans were clothes to keep warm and names that they could call one another by: Ask for the ash log and the first man and Embla for the elm log and the first woman.

If you wonder why Odin was given the name "The All-Father," look no further. From him, all life on Midgard can find its roots. (See more about Odin, The All-Father, on **this page**.)

THE WALLS OF ASGARD

The Aesir often felt that they had nothing to worry about when Thor was around. He was their protector and loved using his hammer, Mjolnir, to chase away any dangers that might plague them. But Thor also sought out dangers, frequently crossing the realms to hunt giants and trolls, and the Aesir agreed that they should build a wall for protection, so they don't always have to rely on the God of Thunder for protection.

A stranger approached the Aesir while Thor was away and told them that he could build an impenetrable wall that could not be vaulted by giants or broken down by trolls. He said that he could build it in three seasons and demanded to be paid with three gifts: the hand of Freyja in marriage, the sun, and the moon. The gods deliberated and Freyja obviously protested. Loki convinced them that if they negotiated their deal correctly, they would get most of an impenetrable wall for free, suggesting that the stranger must complete the wall in one season with no help, and if he failed, he would not receive any of the three gifts. The gods agreed that this option was ideal for them, and they were assured by Loki that they would not lose their gamble.



The stranger acquiesced to their terms on the condition that he could use his horse, Svadilfari, to help carry the stones needed for the wall. The gods made an unbreakable vow and the stranger set to work. They quickly realized that the stranger and the horse were much stronger than they had previously thought, and as winter came to a close, the gods started to think that perhaps he would finish. The gods reconvened and Freyja—who hated this idea the entire time—stated that if she were to be taken away, she wanted Loki killed for putting them all in this position before she left.

Loki assured them that the stranger would not finish and, with a strong suggestion from Odin, transformed into a beautiful chestnut mare to tempt Svadilfari away from the work of hauling the final stones for the wall. Without the help of his horse, the stranger could not finish the wall. He called the Aesir liars and cheats as they gloated over his lost gamble. Then, he transformed into a fifty-foot giant, threatening the Aesir with the boulders he brought down for the wall. Thor returned and killed him before he could do any harm. For a while, no one sees Loki until he returns with the eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, which he presents to Odin as a gift to make peace for his near mishap.

THE THEFT OF THOR'S HAMMER

Thor's hammer, Mjolnir, is his most treasured possession. One morning, he woke to find that it was missing. Whenever something goes wrong, the Aesir usually think that it's Loki's doing, so when it turns out it wasn't, Thor began to panic. In a rare show of selfless assistance, Loki offered to help him find it. With the use of Freyja's winged cloak, Loki visited several people and told them that the hammer was missing. He stumbled upon an ogre named Thyrm who claimed that he had stolen the hammer and hidden it somewhere where the Aesir would never find it. Thyrm would be willing to return it to Freyja as a wedding present if Freyja agreed to marry him. Thor and Loki asked Freyja if she would be willing to marry the ogre, to which she furiously responded a resounding, "No," so loudly that she almost brought her home down on all their heads.

As the two pondered how to get Thor's hammer back, Heimdallr offered a wise and rather counterintuitive solution: dress Thor up as Freyja and have Thor pretend to be her long enough to retrieve the hammer as a wedding present.

All of the goddesses of Asgard adorned Thor with their finest possessions—gorgeous rings, a lovely wedding dress, a bridal crown, and Freyja's signature necklace, Brisingamen. The final touch was a veil to hide Thor's face. Loki easily shapeshifted into a lovely woman to play the role of Freyja's handmaiden, and the two of them set off to Thyrm's hall.

The wedding feast and matrimonial festivities began once Thor and Loki arrived in disguise. Loki instructed Thor to keep quiet and explained away all the odd things that "Freyja" did throughout the feast to keep Thyrm thinking that nothing seemed off about his bride-to-be. When Thyrm wondered how Freyja could eat a whole ox, eight salmons (minus the skeletons), three casks of mead, and all the pastries on the ladies' pastry tray, Loki explained that "Freyja" had been so excited about their impending nuptials that she hadn't eaten for eight days and nights. When Thyrm tried to kiss "Freyja," he got an unexpected peek behind the veil at Thor's angry eyes. He took Loki aside and asked why "Freyja's" eyes looked so murderous. Loki answered that "Freyja" hadn't slept for eight nights because she simply couldn't wait to be married to Thyrm and that her eyes were bloodshot because of it.

Oddly pleased with this explanation, Thyrm brought out his gift for his bride-to-be. It took several of his kin to carry out Mjolnir, and when Thyrm asked if Freyja had anything to say, Thor boomed a laugh and lifted his hammer to everyone's surprise and horror. Thor then leveled Thyrm's hall and disposed of nearly all of the inhabitants. Loki shapeshifted back to his original form and the two headed home to Asgard, Mjolnir in tow.

BALDUR'S MURDER AND LOKI'S IMPRISONMENT

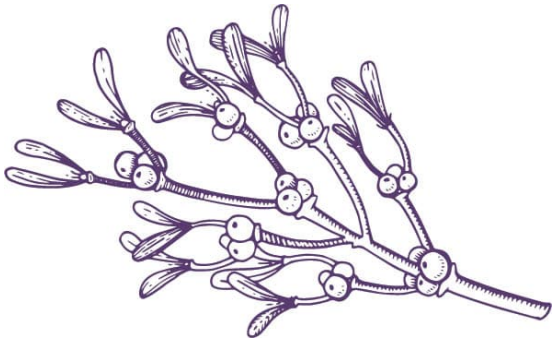
Baldur (also seen as *Balder* and *Baldr*, in some translations), was the son of Frigga and Odin and was well-liked by nearly everyone he met. He was handsome, kind, caring, and beloved, especially by his wife, children, and the rest of his family. The beginning of the end of Norse mythology starts when Baldur begins to have strange nightmares surrounding his death and the tragic end of the world. Under the name Wanderer, Odin traveled into Helheim to see if there was any truth behind Baldur's prophetic nightmares.

There, he had a conversation with Loki's dead giantess wife, Angrboda (*Angrboða* in Old Norse), who was posing as a wise woman. They recognized each other, and she told him that his son would be joining the population of Helheim soon.

When Odin returned and told Frigga, she refused to believe it was true. She asked every weapon, every disease, and everything that could possibly kill her son to please promise to never do him any harm. All agreed, and the

Aesir made a game out of hitting Baldur with clubs, sharp objects, and other things to watch him remain completely unharmed. They all laughed except for Loki, who hated Baldur because of how well loved he was, and Hod, Baldur's blind brother who felt left out.

As the Aesir smashed chairs over Baldur's head and jabbed him with spears, Loki shapeshifted into an old woman and asked Frigga if she really asked everything that existed to not harm her son. Frigga divulges that she did, except for the plant mistletoe, which seemed too small and young to do any damage. The party for Baldur continued as Loki returned to his original form and joined Hod in his corner. Loki listened to Hod as he told him how he felt excluded. Then, Loki gave Hod a dart tipped with mistletoe leaves and offered to point him in the right direction of his brother, if he wanted to spear Baldur like the other Aesir. Hod accepted Loki's offer and the mistletoe dart hit its target true. Baldur died and the gods were inconsolable, especially Frigga.



Hermóðr, another son of Odin, volunteered to go to Helheim to attempt to retrieve Baldur. When he got there, the goddess Hel surprisingly agreed to release Baldur if everyone on Asgard and Midgard said that they missed Baldur. The Aesir combed the realms and asked everyone if they missed him now that he was gone, all of whom were distraught to hear of Baldur's death and confirmed that they indeed missed him. All except one old lady (who was really Loki in disguise) on a mountain who said she did not miss Baldur at all.

Later, at a grand feast with all the residents of Asgard, the Aesir called Loki out for his terrible deeds, so Loki got drunk and berated all of them. He told anyone who tried to shame him to "shut up," and then proceeded to call out all their flaws; however, while doing so, he accidentally revealed

that he caused Baldur's death. With everyone now furious with him, Loki fled the hall.

The gods sought out Loki and trapped him in the form of a fish. However, once they caught the trickster god, none of the gods could ultimately harm Loki due to Odin's blood brotherhood with him. Regardless of this fact, the gods took Loki, now in the shape of a man, to a cave under a mountain along with his Aesir wife, Sigyn, and their two sons, Narfi and Vali. As justice for what Loki did to Baldur and Hod, the gods instead turned Vali, the second son, into a simple-minded wolf. The wolf that was once Vali ripped his brother Narfi to shreds and killed him before fleeing. The gods bound Loki to three stones using his dead son's entrails so tightly that he could hardly move.

Skadi, the goddess of the wilderness who hunts in the mountains on her skis, brought a snake with fangs dripping with venom to the stalagmites hanging from the ceiling of the cave and placed it over Loki's head.

Sigyn, Loki's wife, was provided a bowl which she used to catch the venom dripping from the mouth of Skadi's snake. This stopped it from going into the bound Loki's eyes. Every time the bowl filled, she took it away to empty it. Without Sigyn's vigil, the venom would drip into Loki's eyes and make him thrash in pain that shook the entire realm. This is the cause of earthquakes and harkens the beginning of Ragnarok, the end of the world.

RAGNAROK AND THE NEW WORLD

Ragnarok, or the end of the world (*Ragnarök* and *Ragnarøkkr* in Old Norse), is painted as a beginning as much as it is an end. It acknowledges that the cyclical nature of life and death, endings and beginnings, and death and rebirth were important to the ancient Norse.

That being said, the end of the world is not a pretty or easy thing. This battle between the gods (both Vanir and Aesir), the dead (both honorable warriors and dishonorable residents of Helheim), Jotnar, and fire giants is led by Loki and his children, and very few of the key players survive. Most of the gods will die, but a new world will flourish when the old one withers and makes space.

THE END OF THE OLD WORLD

It is prophesized that we'll know that Ragnarok will begin when Midgard experiences three winters without the sun, followed by three more winters filled with contentious battles where fathers kill their sons. The earth will quake due to Loki thrashing beneath it, trees will uproot and tumble, and mountains will crumble.

The quaking of the earth, as Loki breaks free, will loosen the bonds of Fenrir, the great wolf, and a monstrous son of Loki's. Furious with the gods that tricked him into chains due to fear of his power and hunger, Fenrir will send his sons—Sköll, meaning "treachery" or "mockery," and Hati, meaning "he who hates" or "enemy"—to feast upon the sun and moon.

As mountains topple into the oceans, the Midgard serpent will emerge, and waves of water will engulf the world. Loki and his daughter Hel will ride on a boat made from the fingers and toenails of the dead, with all her subjects of Helheim manning a fleet as they first invade Midgard and then set upon Asgard. At the same time, the sky of Midgard will split and Surtr will emerge with a flaming sword alongside the other furious and fiery entities of Muspelheim to destroy the Bifrost bridge between Asgard and Midgard.

The people and creatures of Helheim and Muspelheim will then engage in a chaotic battle with the Aesir and the Vanir from which no winner will emerge. Well-matched pairs from either side of the conflict will break off and duel to the death.

Fenrir, the ravenous wolf that will be freed from his bonds, will seek out the All-Father, the person who orchestrated his imprisonment. Odin will ride his eight-legged horse, Sleipnir, to fight Fenrir, who will swallow him whole. While the wolf's jaw is still open and Odin falls down the wolf's throat, one of Odin's sons, Vidar, will pin the wolf's bottom jaw to the ground with a boot made of all lost scraps of cloth and clothing. The heavy boot of all the clothing that humanity has lost will keep Fenrir's jaw from closing and protect Vidar as he rips Fenrir's jaw open and kills him. It's said that you can contribute to Vidar's success at Ragnarok by saving your clothing scraps.

Thor has always been eager to fight Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, and the two will fight until the serpent falls dead. Thor thinks he's won and turns his back on the dying serpent to find more foes to hit with his hammer. The Midgard Serpent's final act is to spit venom at Thor's back and the two die steps apart.

Freyr will impressively battle Surtr but inevitably succumbs to his opponent's flaming blade since he traded his own sword as part of his quest to marry his wife. Surtr, although victorious in this duel, will still harbor an internal furnace of rage that burns him from the inside out. His flames will scorch the remnants of Asgard and Midgard before obliterating himself completely.

In the smoking ruins of the battlefield, with the other heroes of Asgard and foes of Muspelheim and Helheim vanquished, Loki and Heimdallr will battle and kill each other.

A few of the children of the gods and minor Aesir survive. Odin and Thor's children (with Thor's sons helping one another, wielding his signature hammer) survive and begin to rebuild the nine realms with a resurrected Baldur under the light of Sól's daughter, the new sun. Along with these gods and goddesses, two humans survive: Lif and Lifprasir (which translates to "life" and "love for life").

CHAPTER 6

TROLLDOM: NORDIC FOLK MAGIC

The Norse mysticism that has been discussed so far began to fade with the process of Christianization in Scandinavia; magic itself waned but did not die out. It's a common misconception that the church completely eliminated magic and witchcraft. On the contrary, many bishops and cardinals in the Catholic Church were avid practitioners of grimoire magic during the Middle Ages and Renaissance! Nordic folk magic has survived until the present day, in the form of Trolldom, by adapting to changing cultural influences. This chapter will provide a basic introduction to Trolldom, its history, and its methods.

BASIC TOOLS AND METHODS

Those who master the traditions of Trolldom are called *trollcunning*, meaning "knowledgeable of spirits" in Swedish (sometimes also called trollkunning). Many of the basic practices of Trolldom will seem familiar, as they retain some characteristics that we saw in the Norse magic of **chapter two**. The practice of *utiseta*, which translates to "sitting out" in Old Norse, was the practice of sitting outside all night to commune with spirits. It's still performed by modern practitioners, usually at places of power in nature that are specific to the individual. Natural objects such as branches, stones, and bones may be collected from such places over time to serve as tools in spellwork.

When casting spells, the direction north is treated as the origin of negative influences, while south is the direction of positive influences. Thursday is considered the most powerful day for spellcasting.

THE BLACK BOOK

Trollcunnings typically write their own spells that are kept in a *svartebok*, or "Black Book." Many old folktales in Scandinavia speak of uninitiated laypeople opening such books and becoming cursed, or accidentally summoning the devil, likely reflecting both the strength of belief in the texts and the church's efforts to discourage them. By the seventeenth century, this term had come to encompass all books of spells, including grimoire texts imported from other European countries.

Today's trollcunnings can use or make any type of notebook they like for a Black Book. The book is used only for recording the incantations and instructions for spells, not general notes or magical theory. The written word is considered to have great power in Trolldom, so this book should be respected and expanded over time to increase its magic. Historical examples of Black Books include incantations written out in the runic alphabet, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and other languages, in addition to the native language of the author. Modern practitioners might also consider writing their Black Book in a code or magical alphabet, to enhance its privacy.

SILENCE AND SECRECY

One unique aspect of Trolldom, as compared to other systems of folk magic, is the belief that spells lose their power when shared with another person. For this reason, trollcunnings strive to maintain privacy and secrecy in their practice, making sure not to carelessly speak or show their spells in front of others. For those of us used to practicing spells out of the witchcraft books available today, this can seem challenging, as it renders any Trolldom spell you find potentially worthless. However, spells from historical Black Books and modern Trolldom classes still serve as valuable examples to help newcomers learn how to begin writing their own spells.

To adhere to this rule, trollcunnings usually cast spells privately or else whisper their incantations softly when they are around others. Written inscriptions for talismans and other magical items can be concealed inside a

pouch or folded up to keep them secret. Many practitioners today believe that mentors can hand down spells to their students, thus giving up the spell and transferring all its magic to the recipient.

USE OF VOICE

Trolldom is similar to Norse galdr magic (see **here**) in that it ascribes great power to words, both written and spoken. Therefore, little magic happens in this tradition without spells being said aloud. These incantations are called "troll formulas," and are recorded in the trollcunning's Black Book. While keeping in mind the importance of keeping one's formulas secret, practitioners should strive to develop confidence in using their voice to build up energy and direct the power of spells. Depending on the purpose, spells might be whispered, chanted, sung, or even shouted.

Beginners should also take very seriously the question of what to say, or what to ask for when performing magic. You should be careful to say what you really mean, ask for what you really want, and keep your word when you say you'll do something. Those who are unclear in their requests or fail to keep a verbal commitment with the spirits will probably end up with bad results in their work.

ANIMISM

Trolldom, like many systems of folk magic worldwide, employs an animist perspective. Animism is a worldview that sees all things as having a spirit, including animals, plants, objects, places, and natural phenomena like storms. While this perspective is alive and well in many cultures today, it takes some getting used to for those of us who have been influenced by monotheism and scientific materialism. Still, animism can provide a radical shift in your magical or spiritual practice.

Consider, for example, the act of casting a spell. When we begin thinking animistically, we realize that we are never truly working alone; the spirits of the place we work in, the materials and tools we use—such as herbs, stones, and wands—and even the ancestral spirits connected to our body are participating in the magic with us. By acknowledging these spirits and asking directly for their help, your spells can become more effective. Therefore, when we say that Trolldom is animistic, we're also saying it's highly collaborative.

HEALING WORK

Folk magic traditions like Trolldom come down to us from the time before our many modern conveniences. As a result, magic was often used to address problems that we would solve by other means today. One example of this is the use of folk magic for healing illnesses and injuries. While I would never recommend that magic take the place of medical treatment from a doctor, magical healing can still be employed to address spiritual afflictions or imbalances.

Trolldom spells for healing were called *bota*, which means "cure" or "to make well" in Swedish, and often employed objects or materials found in nature to help detach curses or stuck-on energies that were harming a person. A fresh cotton wick might be rubbed on a wound and then burned in an oil lamp; the trollcunning might employ a stone specially enchanted for healing; or magical herbs might be cut up from the ground, turf and all, to draw the affliction away.

Historical Black Books also contain many formulas for dispelling the evil eye. This type of curse was believed to be quite common and could be

cast, even by people with no magical training, when they feel envy toward someone else.

PROTECTION WORK

Protection was another common concern addressed using Trolldom. A wide variety of formulas exist to protect against hazards of the spiritual, natural, and man-made variety. Trollcunnings often produce written talismans as part of these spells, which can be carried by the person seeking protection to keep the power of the spell with them.

Some materials found in traditional protection spells include graveyard dirt, drops of blood (particularly menstrual blood), weasel fur, pieces of altar cloth, and rowan wood. Protection talismans could be charged by leaving them under the altar of a church until several holidays or saint's days had been celebrated there. For protection from spirits, specially forged knives or shed ram horns could be hung in the home. There are specific troll formulas that were used to protect livestock from theft, to avoid forest fires, and even to protect instruments from being hexed by rival musicians.

MATTERS OF LOVE

Love spells may be one of the most universal and enduring forms of magic. Surviving Norse love spells bear a strong resemblance to the type of love magic you'll find in the Trolldom tradition. However, just as some spells contain a clear coercive element, the same is true of many Trolldom spells from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries that were intended to make someone fall in love with the caster. Today's witches and sorcerers often consider such spells unethical and pursue alternative forms of love magic.

In addition to many spells to make someone fall in love, Trolldom includes a wide array of spells meant to end an undesirable relationship or marriage, and even to protect against unwanted advances and coercive love spells! Since many love spells involved serving food or drink to the target, those who suspected they were being enchanted could spill some with their left hand and step on it with their left foot (presumably without being noticed) to counteract the effect. Young women would sew peony seeds into the hems of their clothes to protect against men's love spells. Troll formulas were also used to cure heartache so that the caster or client would no longer pine over a lost lover.

TROLL FORMULA FOR PROTECTION FROM FIRE

This seventeenth-century spell may be referencing the ancient Norse custom of carrying the deceased through villages during a funeral:

Nine sons of Nuckander carried Noren,
their dead mother they brought.
Why carry a mother already dead?
She conceals and hides all things.
Just as she did, I do now:
I bind the fire in the hearth.
I bind the pot as it boils.
I bind the riding man.
I bind the sailing ship.
I bind the gates of iron, weeping blood.

This can be modified for more modern audiences by taking the formulas from the bottom of the spell and changing them to meet common inflammatory problems. For example, to curb incendiary gossip, you might use the following:

Just as she did, I do now:
I bind their words to their lips.
I bind the idea as it sparks.
I bind the harmful chatter.
I bind the catty tongue.
I bind the gossip, weeping lies.

Write your own spells using this format. Choose your lucky or holy number and whisper it that many times in a quiet and dark place.

ECLECTIC EVOLUTION OVER TIME

Some who read the runes and favor the Norse gods, upon encountering Trolldom for the first time, express disappointment that it doesn't seem to be "really Norse." A strict Norse reconstructionist (or someone who believes the only way to practice Norse magic authentically is to practice it as it was originated) will often take the position that only spells completely authentic to the pre-Christian tradition are worthy of their tradition. Spells mentioning the Virgin Mary, or incorporating Greek letters, for example, are interpreted as a corruption of the old ways that pagan reconstructionists seek to adhere to.

However, Trolldom is a real, living tradition that has its roots in the earliest magical practices of Scandinavia; it also reflects the cultural and historical evolution of the region over time. This section explores Trolldom's history and examines the diverse influences that have contributed to its growth.

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS

Trolldom formulas are more likely to invoke God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary than they are to call upon Odin, Thor, and Freyja. Though this may seem surprising, we must consider the role of religion from the late Middle Ages up through the early modern period when Trolldom was developing.

Early Norse people were probably more likely to call upon ancestors and local spirits for aid in everyday problems in the first place; direct interaction with the gods was usually left to sorceresses, priests, and clan leaders. When Scandinavia began to convert to Christianity, the Church replaced

many references to the Norse deities, such that plants named for Freyja were instead named for Mary and local heroes that were venerated as ancestors were proclaimed saints. Given the severe consequences that could fall on those who were seen as still honoring the pagan gods, it makes sense that they aren't frequently invoked in the folk magic that developed post-conversion.

Trolldom also includes many Judaic elements in historical formulas, including the psalms, the Hebrew alphabet, and references to figures like Abraham. These were likely imported via magical texts such as grimoires, and via contact with traditions of ceremonial magic that had adopted these practices for magical purposes.

GRIMOIRE INFLUENCES

The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century made it possible for magical traditions, which had been handed down orally or through personal apprenticeships, to be preserved and disseminated easily in print. During the Renaissance, the Catholic Church continued to persecute those seen as witches or heretics, yet magical texts became available in greater abundance than ever before. Books of Arabic herbalism, geomantic divination, astrology, and various forms of ceremonial and folk magic were printed, translated, and distributed around Europe, leading to greater cultural exchange in magical practices.

Catholic authorities were particularly permissive when it came to grimoires of goetic and theurgic magic. These texts described magical

practices that were seen as invoking the power of God and his angels over creation, rather than attributing magical power to the magician (or to Satan). Therefore, not only did the church allow them, but many priests and bishops owned copies and used these spells! When Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia broke away from Catholicism in the Swedish Reformation, starting in the year 1527, production and distribution of these texts increased even more in those places.

Trolldom was therefore in frequent contact with these books and picked up many methods and formulas from them. Elements of astrology, invocations of the names of God and his angels, and symbols pulled from goetic summoning circles made their way into some Black Books, being added onto the traditional Scandinavian beliefs and spells that continued to be the backbone of Trolldom.

ST. CYPRIAN THE MAGE

Svartebok, or Black Books, were referred to by a variety of terms in Scandinavia, one of which was “Cyprianus,” meaning “of St. Cyprian.” Indeed, many Black Books and grimoires that were published and sold in Europe in the 1600s and onward were attributed to St. Cyprian.

The legend of St. Cyprian of Antioch—not to be confused with St. Cyprian of Carthage—states that he was a powerful sorcerer, known for causing trouble with his spells. One day he targeted a girl named Justina with a love spell, but she easily blocked it. Shocked, he asked her how she became so invulnerable, and she replied it was her Catholic faith. Cyprian then swore off sorcery and converted to Christianity, becoming a bishop. St. Cyprian likely never existed in history, but the legend became popular in Spain and Portugal, where St. Cyprian and St. Justina were favored by practitioners of magic. Though the church said St. Cyprian could be prayed to for protection from magic, many people believed he had reconciled his magic and faith and saw him as a sanctified sorcerer who could aid the living.

The first *Book of St. Cyprian* was published in Portugal and translated into other languages. Scandinavia came to adopt the habit of attributing spellbooks to the saint as well, and you'll see him invoked in many historical Black Books.

NORTH AMERICAN IMMIGRATION

While Scandinavian countries are still home to many (if not most) trollcunnings, Trolldom did make its way to North America via immigration from the eighteenth century onward. Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians came to the American colonies, and then the United States, settling primarily in the Midwest and mid-Atlantic regions. Though it seems that these immigrants often sought to assimilate by not handing down traditional folk magic and superstitions to their children, Trolldom didn't die out entirely. A number of Black Books written in the US and Canada have been archived, and folklorists who conducted studies in the twentieth century recorded many stories of Swedish- and Danish-Americans employing protection spells, curses, and divination derived from Trolldom.

A few first- and second-generation immigrants publicly practiced Trolldom, though they rarely called it that. Psychiatrist Dr. Carl Wickland and his wife, Anna, had a private practice in California where they treated mental illness with a combination of medical therapy and spirit work; Anna would remove spirits of the dead afflicting clients, with the help of spirit familiars. Others like Carl Nilsson, Julius and Agnes Zancig, and Max

Heindel found success marketing their Trolldom skills as goetic magic or spiritualism during the occult craze of the late nineteenth century.

Today, some elements of Trolldom can be found mingled with the folk magic of the Pennsylvania Dutch or the Appalachians, reflecting the diverse history of the region. Meanwhile, immigrants coming to Scandinavia from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and Southeast Asia are bringing their own folk magic traditions with them and stimulating further innovations. Trolldom remains a vital, living tradition of Nordic folk magic, connecting us to the magic of the past while giving us the tools to explore an exciting magical future.

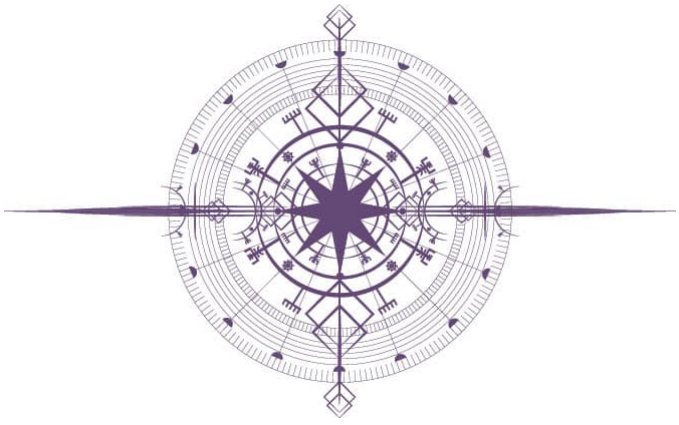
CONCLUSION

Having now broadly explored the history and development of Norse mysticism, I hope you have left with a better understanding of the role of the gods and magic in early Norse society. The cycle that the ancient Norse worshipped never truly ends, just like a snake eating its tail. We can still learn from the wisdom of the early Norse peoples. Their culture, myths, and lore (while different from what ours looks like today) hold a few cardinal truths.

There is magic all around us and the gods and goddesses have not yet received their final reckoning. Run through wild places, strike up new adventures, and cultivate an inviting place to go home to. The spirits of the land and the spirits of our beloved ancestors still hold secrets that they whisper to those with an ear to listen.

This book is a mere introduction to the mythology and magic of Norse mysticism. Like many things, it's best learned through experience. Channel Odin's cunning and always seek new wisdom. Follow your wild heart as Freyja would have wanted. Make mischief and disrupt that which no longer serves you while you wink at the trickster god, Loki. Stay strong and protect that which matters to you, and Thor's hammer will be at your side.

Thank you for embarking on this expedition for new knowledge. I hope even more discoveries are made in your future.



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Disa Forvitin is a lifelong practitioner of mystical traditions and is passionate about history and culture. A pagan through and through, she casts runes and leaves offerings to the nature spirits in the suburbs of the Twin Cities area of Minnesota, where she lives with her partner and an unhealthy number of books.

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